

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK."



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OR,
The Sunken Treasure.

BY ED. L. WHEELER,
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CHAPTER I.

FOUND BY THE WAYSIDE.

UPON an imposing bluff, that stretches along the ocean front for several miles, overlooking the mighty expanse of blue Atlantic, nestled the pretty town of Bluffton.

It boasted of a population of several thousand, and being near a large city, was rather an aristocratic place, combined with the fact that it was a popular summer resort, and had the unusual educational advantages of two high schools.

The town was beautifully laid out, and its dwellings, its lawns, its walks, drives and shades, all showed that the residents were well-to-do and enterprising.

Inland from Bluffton lay a magnificent stretch

THERE WAS A LOOK OF DESPERATE FURY IN HIS EYES, BUT A HAND CAUGHT HIM BY THE THROAT, AND PUSHED HIM BACK AGAINST THE DEAD WALL!

of farming country, while along up and down the coast, and overlooking the majestic ocean, were the almost princely homes of wealthy people.

There was but a narrow strip of beach at the foot of the bluff in front of Bluffton, safe for bathing; at other points the water broke with a ceaseless roar against the rocky barriers.

Upon a little headland were a light-house and a number of shanties, the homes of fishermen and wreckers—hardy, storm-beaten old coast "cats," whom repute had said many hard things about, without ever really proving anything.

Bluffton had a few general stores, a big hotel, and a couple of railway depots, and that was about all that could be said of her business interests; for the most of those inhabitants who had any profession or mercantile calling did business in the not-far-away city.

The coastwise road, that followed the bluff northward from the village, was a magnificent hedge-bordered drive, that continued on for miles, commanding an uninterrupted ocean view, and passing some of the most picturesquely located and grand homes in all the State.

Among others, and a short distance from Bluffton, was Ingleside, the villa of the wealthy and aristocratic Ingles; also Radnor "Ranch," the palatial estate of Roscoe Radnor, the so-called "Duke" of Bluffton.

But of these more anon.

One sunny July afternoon, which would have been excessively warm but for the bracing ocean breeze, a young man came trudging along the north road, toward Bluffton.

He appeared in no particular hurry, for he walked at a leisurely gait, and paused every now and then to drink of the beauteous vista presented by the sunlit Atlantic, with its far-off blue horizon, its distant sails, and nearer dancing silver-capped waves.

No one with any love for Nature could gaze upon the placid, sun-bathed expanse, without experiencing a strange and exhilarating feeling—a desire to drink of this sublime, awe-inspiring cup of beauty.

The young traveler was dusty and travel-stained, and his well-worn shoes indicated that he must have journeyed many miles on foot.

His garments, although not ill-fitting, or out of style, showed unmistakable effects of knock-about usage, and the traveling-bag he carried looked as if it had done much and hard service.

Rather strange in contrast with his other habiliments, was the hat he wore. No ordinary banged-up affair was this, but as glossy and fashionable a silk "tile" as could be selected from any Broadway store. Not a thread of the silk was out of place, nor a fleck of dust upon this model piece of head-gear, upon which the sun glistened with as much vivacity as it did upon the silver-capped waves, beyond the bluff.

As for the young man, himself, he was of medium height, from shoes to shoulders, but his head rested upon a neck of unusual length, and having a rather sharp cast of features, this length of neck gave to his upper person something like a gaunt and *outré* appearance.

He was of muscular body and limbs, however, and in face by no means unhandsome; for, although his features were somewhat sharp, they were of a naturally pleasant and shrewd expression, the expressive mouth and the piercing eyes indicating intelligence and strength of character.

The sun lacked several hours of setting, when, half a mile from Bluffton, he paused upon the Telford walk, which bordered both sides of the road, and placing his bag upon the soft green sward gazed once more off upon the ocean, that lay but a stone's throw away.

"At last!" he said aloud, as if addressing the glistening billows—"at last I am near my destination, prepared. Perhaps it is well I am prepared. The waters that splash upon the beach below, have secrets—ah! how many!—and have been zealously keeping them, for years. And for whom?—for me? That remains to be decided. Yonder pretty village does not know my errand, nor do I mean it shall. One would naturally think that with its churches, schools and the wealth of its aristocracy, Bluffton could not nourish a villainous secret, but that it does my mission will be sure to disclose.

"Twenty-three years ago, when I was a babe, heavy weights sunk a person most dear to me, in the sea before Bluffton, but failed to sink the secret of the foul crime. The secret lives and—I will exhume it, and expose it beyond the possibility of denial, as sure as I am High Hat Harry."

His last words were uttered with ringing earnestness; the lone wayfarer was indeed on a mission.

He took a well-worn wallet from his pocket, and opening it, gazed reflectively at the diminutive wad of notes within.

"Ten dollars," he mused—"all I have, and in a strange locality, at that. When it is gone my willing hands must find something to do, as they always have," and seizing his sachel, he resumed his journey.

Not far had he proceeded when he heard a groan or rather, moan, as of some one in unconscious distress, and looking across the street he saw, lying upon the opposite walk, close against the bordering hedge, a largely-built, well-dressed man, whose gray beard indicated that he was probably over fifty years of age.

His eyes were closed, and his features expressed keen suffering.

The young traveler hastened across the road, and in a moment was kneeling beside the prostrate man, who was just recovering consciousness from the effects of a blow on the back of the head, which had made an ugly bruise and rendered the victim insensible.

In the course of a few moments, the injured man opened his eyes.

His brows contracted into a scowl as his gaze rested upon the face of High Hat Harry.

"Who are you?" he gasped, making a successful effort to rise to a sitting posture.

"I am a stranger, sir, in these parts," the young man replied, "and but a few moments ago, chanced to find you lying here. Seeing that you were returning to consciousness, I awaited to learn the cause of your trouble."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Harry Sands, sir."

"Sands?"

The victim seemed to try to recollect if the name were familiar to him.

"You found me lying here?"

"I did."

"Was no one else in the vicinity?"

"I did not see any one, sir."

A pain in the back part of his head, caused the victim to place his hand upon the bruise.

"Some one hit me there?" he said, eying Sands interrogatively.

"Quite evident, sir. I saw the bruise. The blow must have knocked you senseless, for it was a wicked one."

"Yes. I remember being struck, but no more. What time is it?"

"I have no watch, sir, but judge by the sun that it is in the neighborhood of five o'clock."

"So late! Then I must have been lying here for three hours. Ugh! my head aches, and I don't believe I've enough strength to stand alone."

"If I can be of any assistance to you, sir, you have but to command me," High Hat Harry said, respectfully.

"Thank you. My name is Roscoe Radnor, and my home is yonder where you see the villa with the observatory at one corner. I feel so weak that I shall have to order my carriage to come for me. So if you will go to my house and notify my family that I need their assistance, I will be very much obliged to you."

"With pleasure, sir. In the mean time I will leave my sachel in your care."

"Certainly, I will keep watch of it."

Depositing the bag beside Mr. Radnor, young Sands turned and strode rapidly toward Radnor "Ranch," which chanced to be the nearest residence, and as he remembered it, a magnificent stone villa of modern architecture, set down in a pretty lawn, where shrubs and flowers, spraying fountains and statuary formed a pleasing feature.

High Hat Harry, as he had been pleased to style himself, was a swift walker, and soon arrived in front of the lawn, where two young men were engaged in a game of lawn tennis—stylishly-attired young men, of somewhere near his own age.

They saw him, too, as he paused just without the hedge, and ceased playing, in order to stare at him curiously, one of them bursting into a laugh.

"I say, Ray, old fel, do look at it, and give me a definition of it. Is it an ostrich or a sand-hill crane?"

"No, it is a giraffe!" High Hat Harry quickly retorted. "It's just escaped from a menagerie."

The young man who had been addressed as Ray neither smiled nor noticed his companion's remark, but, on the contrary, regarded Harry searchingly.

"Is there something you want, sir?" he asked.

"There is," Harry replied, "providing either of you is related to Mr. Roscoe Radnor."

"I am his son, sir—Ray Radnor. Why, what is the matter?"

"Nothing serious, I trust. Your father is hurt, by the roadside north of here, and wants his carriage sent to bring him home."

"Indeed! Thank you, sir, for bringing us word. I will order the carriage at once, and if you will wait you can ride back."

"No, thank you, I prefer to walk," and bowing, High Hat Harry turned away, after giving a lingering glance at young Radnor's companion, who had insulted him on account of the unusual length of his neck.

"I fancy, perhaps, you may run afoul of this ostrich, sometime, my fine fellow," he muttered.

CHAPTER II.

AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION.

ERE Harry had accomplished half the distance back to where he had left Mr. Radnor, he was overtaken and passed by the family barouche, drawn by two spirited horses.

The occupants of the equipage were Ray Radnor, a pretty young lady of eighteen, and the driver, a ponderous individual.

Both young Radnor and the young lady—who was evidently his sister—bowed at Harry, as they dashed past, and he tipped his hat in acknowledgment.

"A deucedly pretty girl!" he mused, as the vehicle rolled on. "She's evidently a Radnor, too, for she and the young man look alike."

By the time he reached the spot where he had first found Mr. Radnor, that gentleman had been assisted into the carriage, which stood in waiting for Harry to come up.

"Mr. Sands, allow me to thank you for your haste!" the injured man said. "And, now, in addition, how much am I indebted to you?"

"Fifty thousand dollars, sir!" was the reply, while Harry's face wore no expression to indicate but what he meant what he said.

"Fifty thousand dollars?" echoed Mr. Radnor, in astonishment.

"Exactly, sir. I should just as quickly accept that sum, as I would accept a penny."

"Ah! I comprehend. You place no value on your services!"

"So far as I have been able to assist you, *no!* You are most welcome to what little I have done."

"Thank you again; but I must insist that you accept some recompense, trifling though it may be."

"And I must decline. I'm not that style of a steamboat—pardon the expression, please!"

"Then, you must accept our combined thanks, and best wishes!" Miss Radnor said, earnestly.

The barouche rolled away, and High Hat Harry continued on his way.

When he arrived in Bluffton, he put up at the Oceanic Hotel, and, by taking a fourth-story room, was enabled to pay for his board and lodging, one week in advance.

The Oceanic was the only hotel in the town—a huge square brick edifice, surrounded by a broad piazza, and three tiers of promenade balconies, and was, at this season of the year, well filled with summer guests.

A fine ocean-view ball-room was one feature of the house, and the excellent orchestra in attendance during the evening, made it a favorite resort for its evening hops and social gatherings.

High Hat Harry's room, facing the ocean, was cool and pleasant.

So after taking a bath, and burnishing up his rusty attire, he sat down at one of the windows, and gazed thoughtfully out upon the briny deep, over which the sun was casting its farewell glinting rays.

For perhaps an hour he remained in a state of uninterrupted reverie, then he heard two persons conversing, out upon the balcony, near his window.

He made no effort, at first to see who or what they were, although he judged by their voices that both were young ladies.

"Oh! Ida, I am sure our boys will win. Mr. Garrene assured me to-day that there was no possibility of the Barmore club winning!"

"I am not so sure!" Ida replied, in a doubtful tone. "Of course it will be a delightfully exciting contest, but if I were to bet, I would choose the Barmores. They are such handsome, athletic fellows. The Blufftons, with one or two exceptions, are duds."

"And what's nicer than a dude?" giggled Ida's friend. "I just dote on dudes—they are so delicate and refined! Anyhow, I'm backing the Blufftons."

"For how much, Sylva?"

"Oh! my, do not ask me. I really would not dare tell, for if it should get to papa's ears he would be terribly angered."

"Indeed! Then he does not know that you gamble?"

"Mercy, no! He is adverse to gaming of any kind. That's why he cleared brother Forest away, two years ago."

"So I have heard. And I was greatly surprised when I learned that you gambled."

"Ha! ha! ha! I've not a doubt of it. That is all very easily accounted for, however, you know. You are fresh from a back-in-the-country town, where the stupid people think it a sin to do anything but eat, drink and go to church. Why, all of our fashionables, nowadays, play cards and bet on races and matches, Ida."

"If so, cousin, I cannot agree that it is proper. It is bad enough for men to do such things as that!"

"Bah! What a silly goose you are indeed! Why, do you suppose we girls are going to let the young men get ahead of us? Not much! The men are but stupid, anyhow, and woman-kind was designed to lead. Why, a society young lady of to-day is behind the times, if she can't box, swim, row, play the banjo, smoke, drink, pitch a curve, bet successfully on the sporting events of the day, and count her mashes by the hundred. Really, I am afraid I shall have a hard time trying to break you in, so that you will be fashionable."

"I fear so, too, if I must acquire all of the vices you named, in order to become accomplished!" Ida declared, a trifle sarcastically.

"Vices—nonsense! Wait till I ride home from the ball-match, to-morrow with two thous—"

"Sylva Ingle!"

Ida uttered the name as if she were astounded.

"Why! what's the matter, cousin?"

"Can it be possible that you have wagered the sum of two thousand dollars on the result of the ball-game, to-morrow?"

"Why, of course, you goose;—but, mind you, not a word of this to any living soul, or I'll cease to be your *chaperone*"—with a laugh. "The money's up, and I am sure to win."

"Sylva! Sylva! I am astonished!"

"Ha! ha! You'll have more than that to astonish you before you know the ropes of our first society. Why, two thousand dollars isn't much."

"I should suppose not, by the recklessness with which you risk losing it."

"That shows your good sense. Why I am running no risk at all!"

"I fail to see how you make that out!"

"Then, I will explain. Allowing that the Barmore Academy boys may be good players, there is not the ghost of a show of their winning, to-morrow—the ever-glorious Fourth. The reasons are obvious. The Barmores are young bloods who generally celebrate the Fourth of July by getting full!"

"But, do not your home club do the same?"

"They will not, to-morrow, for the reason that they have pledged themselves not to drink a drop, until after the game is over. There's too much Bluffton money at stake!"

"Well?"

"Well, a second reason why the Barmores will not win, is because their favorite pitcher, Maccaire, is lying low with typhoid fever, and they will have to substitute a poor man; and you know our Mr. Streeter has been asked for, by professional clubs. Nor is that the last reason."

"What is it, then?"

"Well, you see—this, in private, between you and me—Mr. Garrene is to umpire the game, and, as he has money bet on the Blufftons, and is growing quite popular, in our society, he will hardly be apt to give the other club the benefit of his decisions."

"But, that wouldn't be fair, Sylva?"

"Pooh! All's fair, in love, or war, you know. The Barmores carried off the pennant, last year, but they will have to give it up, this year."

"Whom did you bet with, Sylva?"

"My rival!"

"Your rival?"

"To be sure—Stella Radnor, whose father's estate adjoins Ingleside."

"Then you both love the same man?"

"Yes—at any rate I love him. Why, Ida, I worship him—I do not know what I could not do to reap the reward of winning him."

"Is he handsome?"

"As an Apollo. You shall judge, however, for he will most likely attend the match, to-morrow, and the hop, in the evening."

"What is his name?"

"Carrol Cuthbert, and he is every inch as sweet as his name, I assure you."

"And so Stella Radnor is your rival?"

"Yes. The proud little primp—I hate her!"

"Which one of you does your lover like best?"

"Oh! I don't know. He is a perfect gentleman, and seems careful not to manifest any preference for the society of one or the other. Of course, however, I believe that he likes me the best. Much depends upon the result of to-morrow's game."

"How is that?"

"Well, you see, Mr. Cuthbert isn't very wealthy, and being his friend, I have several times prevailed upon him to solicit loans of money from papa. You see, Mr. Cuthbert is the only living descendant and lineal heir to Pirate Petrie's fortune if it is ever recovered."

"Pirate Petrie's fortune?"

"Yes. Did you never hear about it? Well, tradition has it that in 1813 a pirate vessel sunk off this coast, at a point directly opposite this village, which had on board a vast fortune in gold. The vessel was commanded by a pirate chieftain, named Paul Petrie, and it was intended to land the gold, here—there were no habitations anywhere about here, then—and bury it. Before the vessel got within anchoring distance of land, however, there was a mutiny on board, and a fight, which resulted in the vessel being scuttled, and sunk."

"Petrie's son, a lad of twelve, was washed ashore alive, and is supposed to have been the only survivor. He grew to manhood, in this vicinity, married, and a son was born to him. Soon after, he mysteriously disappeared, and, after a year of almost starvation, his wife was forced to take her son, and return to her parents. She died, afterward, but first had her son's name legally changed to Cuthbert, her maiden name, not wishing him to bear the stigma of being in name a pirate's grandson."

"Not many months ago young Cuthbert returned here, in hopes of getting backing to secure the raising of the sunken fortune, but, although receiving immediate social recognition from our people, has not, I believe, succeeded in securing the help to enable him to employ a wrecking company to locate and raise the ship. There is talk, however, of capitalists combining and giving him the necessary assistance, and there is no doubt but what, at an early day, he will be at least a millionaire."

"Well, as I was going to say, I have arranged it so that he has secured several loans, privately, from my father. Of course, being in a strait, he can but feel grateful for these loans. The last one was for five hundred dollars, and I have learned, from private sources, that he has wagered every cent of it that the Barmores will win, to-morrow. I think Stella Radnor tempted him to bet that way—if so, so much the better. He will surely lose, and have to come to me again, for assistance. I will improve the snap, and if there isn't a wedding, shortly, I'll lose my guess. But, I must get back to Ingleside. You will be at the match, to-morrow?"

"Oh! cert!" Ida replied, with a laugh.

"Good! I see you are improving, in phraseology. Well, I'm off. Ta! ta!"

High Hat Harry had overheard every word of the foregoing conversation, and not without experiencing considerable amusement and surprise.

To-morrow was the Fourth of July.

The Barmore and the Bluffton base-ball clubs were going to play.

And there was considerable money going to change hands.

And the Barmores were not to be treated to fair dealing, by Garrene, the umpire.

"I think I shall have to attend this game!"

High Hat Harry said, to himself, as he quitted his room, and went down to supper.

CHAPTER III.

OFFERED AND ACCEPTED.

As his attire was somewhat shabby, Harry felt naturally rather bashful when he entered the thronged dining-room of the Oceanic, where was congregated such an array of fashionably-attired ladies and gentlemen, quite a majority of whom were about his own age.

Of course he was conscious of the curious glances leveled at him, because of the deformity of his neck, but he consoled himself with thinking:

"Let 'em look. They may make fun of me now, but I will perhaps have my revenge by surprising 'em all some of these days."

Anyhow, he was glad when he got out of the dining-room, and took a walk toward the post-office.

It was a beautiful evening, with a bracing breeze blowing in from the ocean, and the great yellow, full moon that came up with its accus-

tomed promptitude, transformed the picturesque village and the sobbing sea into a panorama of supreme loveliness.

The main street of the town, running near the edge of the bluff, with its business places on the inland side, was a most charming promenade, and as he made his way toward the post-office, High Hat Harry passed many couples, and became aware that the general topic of conversation was about the ball-match on the morrow.

Ladies, old and young, seemed as much enthused upon the subject as the males.

On arriving at the post-office, the stranger asked for mail, but, as he had anticipated, there was none for him, and he returned and took a seat upon the hotel piazza, where he occupied some time in watching the passers-by.

Two young men sat near him, and he occasionally caught up a snatch of their conversation.

"I wonder what's the matter between Stella and Cuthbert?" said one.

"Why, nothing, I guess. I saw them at the hop last evening."

"So did I. But, here comes Cuth, now, with the Ingle hitched on!"

"Oh! that's nothing. It's nip-and-tuck between those girls, which secures the most of Cuthbert's attention."

"He's a regular lady-killer, eh?"

"Oh! you bet!"

A stylish couple were approaching, and High Hat Harry watched them with more than a little curiosity.

The man was a trifle above medium height, and formed in nature's happiest mold, with a round pleasant face and light-brown hair, a tawny blonde mustache, and sparkling eyes of brown. His movements were easy and graceful, his attire faultless, and he was certainly a handsome man.

The lady who accompanied him was about twenty years of age, if appearances went for anything, *petite* and symmetrical of figure, and a decided brunette, with brilliant, dusky eyes and hair as black as jet.

She, too, was fashionably attired, and if the idea that extremes make a happy match is of any practical worth, it was at once evident that Sylva Ingle and Carrol Cuthbert ought to marry.

An apt observer might have taken notice that, as the couple passed by where Harry Sands was sitting, his gaze followed them, critically, until they were lost in the crowd of other promenaders.

"Very handsome!" the young man mused, when he could no longer see them. "I wonder—"

Just then a nobby phaeton, drawn by two creamy horses, dashed up in front of the hotel, and came to a halt at the curb.

The driver and sole occupant of the stylish equipage was a pretty young lady of eighteen, just a trifle plumper than Sylva Ingle, and also a trifle prettier, with a vivacious, sunny face, lit up by a pair of large, expressive hazel eyes, to which charms were added one of the sweetest of mouths, a wealth of becomingly-arranged hair, the hue of a morning sunbeam. Richly attired, and yet with refined taste, she was certainly a vision of loveliness to set a man's pulse beating faster.

High Hat Harry saw her, and averted his gaze to the horses, presuming most naturally that she would not care to recognize him when before a piazza full of fashionable guests, if, indeed, she had not already forgotten him.

But he was mistaken, and felt—well, he could not have described how—when he heard his name called:

"Mr. Sands?"

He arose, and descended the piazza steps, raising his hat gracefully, but really conscious of little else, except that he was aiming for the phaeton.

"At your service, Miss Radnor," he articulated as he paused beside the vehicle.

He felt immensely relieved, too, when she spoke in a tone not for the ears of those upon the piazza.

"I am pleased to see that you have tarried in Bluffton, Mr. Sands," she said, so winningly that Harry inwardly wished that some giant wave from the moonlit Atlantic would rush up over the bluff and engulf him. "I am sure you will like the place, and to impress you with the beauty of the surroundings, I wish you to drive me down the coast. It is such a delightful evening!"

"Why—if I will not be intruding, Miss—"

Harry began.

"Certainly you will not be intruding. Get right in. I want your opinion of my new pets,

Dolly and Dot. Do not hesitate at all, sir. I choose my company, and shall be delighted with your society!"

By which Harry surmised that she had seen Sylva Ingle and Carrol Cuthbert, and was secretly vexed.

Anyhow, he was soon seated beside her, with the ribbons in his grasp, and at a word from him, the horses trotted away down the Telford drive, spiritedly, leaving behind a crowd of staring bloods on the Oceanic veranda, who would have given their check any day for one of Stella Radnor's bewitching smiles.

It did not take long for Harry and his fair companion to fall into an easy conversation, for Stella Radnor was not a "stuck-up" bird of fashion, but a sociable, sensible girl, a brilliant conversationalist, with a tact for preventing any awkward pauses, and altogether a most charming companion.

They passed Cuthbert and Sylva shortly after leaving the Oceanic, but Stella deigned them not a glance, and chatted as gayly to young Sands as though she had known him all her life.

As they drove, Harry learned that Mr. Radnor was feeling much better, and would not experience any serious inconvenience from the bruise upon his head. It seemed he had taken a stroll toward Bluffton, three hours prior to being found by Harry; but that was all that was known, as he could remember nothing more than of receiving a blow on the head from behind.

The object of the assault was also a mystery, as nothing about Mr. Radnor's person had been disturbed.

"Yes, the matter is a perplexing mystery," Stella said, "and the more so because papa is one of the most respected and influential men of this community. He has not a single enemy in the world, that he is aware of."

"He is very lucky then!" Harry replied.

"Not every one can say that."

"I suppose not."

"Will your father put detectives on the case?"

"I don't know. Perhaps he will. There are no detectives in Bluffton, your know—unless, you are one," and she darted him a quick glance.

"What caused you such a thought as that?"

"Oh! I don't know. Detectives are such odd geniuses, you know—always turning up just after some offense has been committed, requiring their services."

"You must have been reading up Vidocq?"

"So I have. But, Mr. Sands, you have not denied that you are a detective?"

"That is a fact. But, supposing for instance, I were not to deny it? Would all Bluffton know my profession, ere another sunset?"

She cast him a reproachful glance.

"Why, certainly not, Mr. Sands. I hope you do not believe me so unladylike as to betray a confidence?"

"If I were to express an opinion, I should say no. And, therefore, as you have chosen to do me a most unexpected and undeserved honor this evening, I will tell you that I am professionally a detective, and I am here at Bluffton for a purpose. What that purpose is, could not, for the present, interest any one, consequently, I do not care to have my true character made known."

"I appreciate your confidence, sir, and you can rely upon my word that I will not betray it."

"Thank you. If it falls within my province to find out who your father's assailant was, I will do so, but without showing my agency. And now, as we drive back, I have a question to ask you. There is a ball-match to be played in Bluffton, to-morrow?"

"Oh! yes, sir!" enthusiastically. "The Barmores, of Barmore Academy, are to play the Blufftons. Oh! it will be just splendid fun."

"So I presume. You side with the home club, no doubt?"

"No, indeed! Why, I have money bet on the Barmores!"

"Is that so? Then, are you aware that Maccaire, the Barmore pitcher, is too ill to play, and that the home club is almost certain to win?"

"I so learned, to-day, and have felt very much discouraged. I would not have the Blufftons win, to-morrow, for anything, although my own brother is the captain."

"So I am aware, and have heard that you have a considerable sum at stake."

Stella looked frightened.

"Mercy! who told you?" she gasped.

"Oh! it is not advisable for me to say. Detectives have various methods of finding out

things, you know. From what I have learned, however, you would consider the loss of your wager money as compared with the loss of the game of no consequence."

"Indeed I would!"

"I thought so. And so, if you wish, the loss of either can be averted!"

"Can it! Oh! Mr. Sands, tell me how?"

She was all aquiver with eagerness and excitement; and her brilliant eyes looking up into his, and her small gloved hand resting upon his shoulder, as the horses sped along through the moonlight, almost made him wish that he had been born handsome like Carrol Cuthbert.

"Very easily!" he answered. "Get me the position of pitcher on the Barmore club to-morrow, and I will win the game!"

"You? Then you are a player?"

"Let that remain to be seen."

"You shall have the place, I will guarantee! I am a friend of the Barmores, and they will do whatever I say. Here is a small sum of money. Take it, and on our arrival in Bluffton, telegraph the Barmores, and make the arrangements. And, mind you, Mr. Sands, if we win the game to-morrow, you and I will lead the grand march at the hop in the evening!"

"Thank you, Miss Radnor! I fancy I am hardly presentable enough to accept that honor. However, you can rest assured that the home club will sustain a crushing defeat to-morrow, if I play. And there will be more fun than a little."

They drove back to the Oceanic, and Harry got out, while Miss Radnor drove on homeward.

It is unnecessary to say that the young stranger was regarded with great curiosity by the piazza loungers, but he did not give them an opportunity to stare at him long, for he made his way to the telegraph office, within the hotel, and opened communication with Barmore, ten miles distant.

The message he sent was as follows:

"A ball-player, known as High Hat Harry, is recommended to you by Miss Stella Radnor, to fill the place of Mr. Maccaire, on to-morrow's game. If the place is open, count upon a victory, and wire me at once."

"HARRY SANDS,

"Oceanic Hotel,

"Bluffton."

The answer came back within an hour:

"MR. HARRY SANDS:—We have been anticipating defeat to present time, but now—never! Accept you? Why, to be sure, and we send three rousing cheers for High Hat Harry."

"THE BARMORE B. B. CLUB."

CHAPTER IV.

HARRY ON HIS MUSCLE.

THE MORN dawned bright and with a cloudless sky, a stiff breeze blowing off Atlantic's blue expanse, and with every indication of a pleasant day.

Fourth of July expectations generally keep a town on the *qui vive*, the night preceding. Lovers meet and agree upon arrangements for next day's pleasures; coxey homes contemplate picnics and a display of bunting; the small boy works up his vivid imagination on the subject of fire, and bang, and smoke; and the bummer—the bummer looks over his scanty board of money, wonders where he will fall in with his liberal friends on the morrow, and if, after they have all treated, he will have enough to fill out the day in glorious style, all by himself.

At Bluffton, midnight saw the town quiet and dark, and its aristocratic population evidently asleep; but when the town awoke at day-dawn, a change had taken place.

The fakir—the perennial, everlasting, irrepressible and inextinguishable fakir—had arrived in all his glory, with his ice-cold lemonade red as a ripe cherry; with his prize packages; with his doll babies—knock one down and get a cabbage-leaf cigar; the pop-corn man; the peanut and candy man; the smiling and glib-tongued three-card-monte manipulator; and last but not least, the poor old organ-grinder and his educated monkey—one or the other blind for thirty years; hard to tell which.

Other attractions in the way of side-shows, with three-legged calves, fat women and snakes, might have been there but for the fact that Bluffton was too aristocratic and its authorities would not tolerate such nuisances.

High Hat Harry passed a night of sweet repose, with a vision of pretty Stella Radnor constantly before his mind's eye, and arose at sunrise refreshed and vigorous.

The Oceanic was supplied with salt-water baths, and after enjoying one of these, the young detective took a two-mile walk, and returned in time for breakfast, with rosy cheeks.

After breakfast he procured a cigar at the

hotel bar, and, while lighting it, noted that he was eyed curiously by a small party of loungers.

One of these was the young man who had cast the insult at him, from the Radnor lawn—a dandish, undersized young fellow, with a few flaxen hairs upon his upper lip, and a quite effeminate face.

Most conspicuous of the group, however, was a man in a blue suit and a light plug hat—a sportish appearing individual, with a preponderance of stomach, short thick legs, broad shoulders, and a fat face, whose principal characteristics were a coarse black mustache, eyes and hair to match, and a livid scar at one side of his forehead.

He wore a "loud" display of jewelry, and carried himself with the swagger of one who considered himself a person of unusual importance.

As High Hat Harry turned away from the bar, he heard the following remarks:

"Oh! he's a city chap. One can't buy second-hand clothing, except in large cities."

"Humph! And the Queen took him to drive, last night?"

"Oh! that's because the gov'nor sent her, as a mark of appreciation for services rendered. But, *ain't* he a freak, though! I'll bet he's given Barnum the slip!"

"Oh! dry up!"—this from the man in blue.

"He may be brought to time, all O. K.!"

He then stepped forward, and tapped the departing detective upon the shoulder.

"A moment, please, sir!" he said: "I would like to speak with you."

High Hat Harry turned around quickly, and took a more searching look at the man—whose remarks he had, of course, overheard.

"Well, sir?" he said, interrogatively—"what?"

"Ahem!—why—excuse me, but it strikes me that you and I have met, before, have we not?" rubbing his hands blandly together.

"Not that I am aware of!" Harry replied, coolly. "I have not the slightest recollection of having met you, before."

"No? Well, beg pardon, but it struck me your face was familiar. Your name is Sands, is it not?"

"It is."

"Ah! I thought so. Let me see—it must have been in St. Louis I saw you. My name is George Garrene."

"I guess you must have your mind on some other person, sir. I was never in St. Louis, nor do I remember ever being acquainted with a person of your name."

Harry spoke pointedly enough to have precluded the necessity of further interrogation, but Garrene did not seem inclined to end the conversation.

"Oh! well; maybe it was not in Saint Louis," he persisted; "anyhow, I am confident of having met you, somewhere, heretofore. And I have also learned that you are to pitch for the Barmores, to-day?"

"I am, sir."

"Ahem!—yes. Now, Mr. Sands, haven't you been unduly influenced—that is to say, don't you think you have rather made yourself subject to criticism by giving us Bluffton boys the cold shoulder? We are all a rollicking, jolly and sociable set of fellows, and I am afraid your alliance with the Barmores, whom we are going to try to defeat, will make you somewhat unpopular with our people, being as you are a stranger, here. Think for a moment, now—am I not right?"

"Well, I don't see that, as I have courted no popularity here, and so could not lose any. As for being duly or unduly influenced, that's out of the question. I heard the Barmores were weak of a pitcher, and as I sometimes enjoy a game of ball, I concluded to offer my services."

"Too bad! But then, possibly, it won't make any difference. We have a fine club!"

"That is not for me to dispute, as I have never seen them."

"Oh! of course. You see, Mr. Sands, there is a great deal of Bluffton money up, on this game, and it is important that we should win. Therefore, believing you to be a professional, we mean to do one of two things!"

"Indeed? That is rather a confident assertion to make, without knowing what I might have to say about it. What do you propose to do?"

There was no mistaking the tone of the baseball detective now!

George Garrene scowled slightly, and folded his arms, as if for effect.

"Why, sir!" he said, "we will either *buy* you, or we will *bar* you out of the game!"

A look of commingled surprise and disgust swept over High Hat Harry's face.

"Buy me?" he echoed.

"Yes—or bar you!"

"Ha! ha! ha! You really amuse me. Why, you poor miserable braggart, you could not buy one drop of my perspiration, nor does it lie within the power of you or your cronies, to bar me out of the game to-day, or any other game!"

A tigerish gleam sprung into Garrene's eyes, while his face darkened with rage.

"You can't be bought, eh?" he gritted.

"My stock is not subject to brokerage!"

"And you can't be barred out?"

"No, for I never played with a professional club!"

"And you intend to play your best to defeat the Blufftons?"

"I do!"

"And, I am a poor miserable braggart?"

"I believe I remarked something of the kind!"

At which sarcastic retort, George Garrene's knotty right fist struck out fiercely, in a blow from the shoulder.

The blow was aimed at High Hat Harry's face, and had it reached its mark, there is probability that Harry's swan-like neck would have snapped off, short!

But, Harry promptly stepped to one side, and the force of Garrene's blow carried him forward, flat upon his face, or rather upon his stomach, as that most naturally kissed the floor first.

A roar of pain escaped the sport, and he gained his feet, with his nasal protuberance beautifully skinned, and emitting a stream of blood.

In the mean time the young spindle-legged dude, who had now twice insulted the man with the high hat (and who Harry afterward learned was Ira Ingle, Sylva's brother) sprung forward and endeavored to display his pugilistic propensities; but one quick blow from the base-ball detective floored Mr. Dude, and the combat was ended.

Ingle lay serenely upon the floor, although in a somewhat undignified position, as George Garrene dizzily gained his equilibrium, and allowed his friends to wipe the crimson from his flowing nostrils.

High Hat Harry leaned complacently against the bar, and watched the cleansing process, with a faint smile curling his lip.

A tap on the shoulder turned his attention to the muscular, but gentlemanly-appearing bartender.

"I'm afraid you have made an unfortunate move," the dispenser of liquors observed.

"Eh? You do? Perhaps you want to take up the matter to a finish!" And Harry laughed dryly.

"Oh! no!" the bartender made haste to say. "I am quite content with my present presentable appearance. You mistake my meaning. The bloods of Bluffton will be down on you, now!"

"Will they?"

"As sure as brine is salty. I know 'em. They do not work singly, but together. So, take a friend's warning, and be on your guard."

"Thank you. I don't anticipate any trouble, but if it comes to trouble—"

He did not finish the sentence, but contracted his brows into such a comical frown, and crossed his gaze so startlingly, that the bartender's estimation of him went up a hundred per cent.

CHAPTER V.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEEP.

As none of the parties in the bar-room of the Oceanic showed any disposition to push the quarrel further, Harry took his departure, and wended his way to the beach for an hour with the waves and his own thoughts.

Watching the lines of surf rolling in, in grand procession, upon the sands, he espied an object that at once attracted his attention.

It was a large flat glass flask, and, judging by the way in which it bobbed about, was corked, else it would have sunk.

Harry had heard and read much about messages from the great unfathomable deep, coming ashore in bottles, and the like, and he watched the bottle, with considerable curiosity.

The tide was going out; consequently the bottle came no nearer the land, but, on the contrary was gradually receding from it.

It was not yet so far out, however, but that, at the expense of getting a thorough wetting, he could secure it.

"I've a good notion to posses that bottle!" he muttered. "Who knows but what it may contain news important to some one?"

The sun was now blazing hot. Even if he did get wet, it would not take him long to dry off, long before the ball game would be called.

He scanned the beach and the shanties in the background, but not a soul was to be seen.

That settled it.

Laying what money and papers he had upon the silvery sands, he entered the surf, and by wading in up to his neck, secured the bottle and returned to shore.

The bottle was a thick, old-fashioned affair, capable of holding two quarts, and contained a straw-colored paper inclosure. The neck of the bottle was corked and sealed with wax, and the contents were consequently intact and well-preserved.

Sitting down upon the warm sand, High Hat Harry broke the bottle and extracted the little package from among the pieces of glass.

Tearing it open with some eagerness, he found that it contained gold-pieces to the value of two hundred dollars, and a scrap of paper, which read thus:

"ON BOARD THE SKULL, July 7, 1813.

"I have scuttled her, because they plotted mutiny and to rob me. We all go down together in sight of land, with over a million worth of gold on board. Twenty-four years, to-day, I have been a pirate. Twenty-four years hence, if the dead are allowed to return, in spirit, my noble ship will rise, and sink again forever. Who finds the inclosed gold I make the heir to my sunken treasure. PAUL PETRIE, Commander of the Skull!"

High Hat Harry had scarce finished reading this extraordinary note and stored it and the money away in his pocket, when, rising to his feet, he was confronted by a man of decidedly unpleasant and unprepossessing aspect—a broad-shouldered, brawny customer, slouchily dressed after the style of a coast fisherman, swarthy, and with coarse, brutal-looking features.

As he paused before High Hat Harry, his brows were contracted into a dark scowl, and his whole appearance was more calculated to intimidate than to attract.

"Hello! young feller!" he saluted, gruffly.

"Hello!" Harry replied, coolly, as he made an inventory of the man from head to foot.

"Guess you been in a-swimmin', eh?" the man asked, with a hitch at his trowsers.

"Not exactly. I generally swim in still water."

"Oh! ye do, eh? Waal, that's news!"

"What do you want?" demanded Harry, his anger rising.

"What do I want? Look here, mate, don't be quite so slack wi' yer tongue, or first ye know I'll swaller ye like Jonah did the whale. I'm Black Budd, the terror of the coast."

"Then your looks belie you!" High Hat Harry retorted, coolly. "You don't look as if you could terrify a sand-fly."

"Don't I? Well, ye don't know me yet."

"I dare say not, nor am I particularly desirous of knowing you. If you have anything of importance to say, say it, or else move on."

"Me move on? Haw, haw! That's good. I reckon Black Budd uses his own time 'bout movin'. I happen ter hev somethin' to say, too. I see'd ye go inter the surf, fetch out a bottle, break it, an' take somethin' from it, which same ye hev got in yer pocket. Whatever was it, I want."

"You do?"

"You bet! I throw'd that bottle away, wi' nothin' in it, months ago, an' now it's come back wi' somethin' in it."

"That's a very transparent lie," High Hat Harry unhesitatingly declared. "If I found anything in the bottle, that's my own business, and none of yours. So put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

Black Budd glared at the young detective for an instant, as if tempted to rush upon and annihilate him on the spot; then, seeming to suddenly change his mind, he uttered an oath, turned upon his heel and strode away.

High Hat Harry gazed after him until he had disappeared in one of the beach shanties, then he ascended the steep staircase to the top of the bluff.

As soon as possible he made an exchange of one of the old Spanish coins for United States money with the hotel proprietor, after which he sought a clothing-store and procured a complete change of attire, which most favorably altered his appearance, and he felt that he was presentable at least to a public crowd.

When the hour came to repair to the fair ground, where the game was to be played, he set out on foot for the rendezvous.

He had not gone far, however, for the grounds were located on the outskirts of the village—when a stone, hurled by some unseen hand, struck him on the right arm above the elbow.

For a moment he believed his arm was broken, so excruciating was the pain; but, look whither he would, he could see no one whom he could

suspect of an attempt to injure him. In fact, he could not see a person within stone-throwing distance of him.

For a moment he could but stand and grit his teeth, his arm pained him so; but, satisfied that the member was not broken or seriously injured, he went bravely on, a gleam of resolution in his eyes.

"That was a cowardly attempt to disable me," he muttered; "but, by the eternal! I'll play the game if I faint in my tracks through pain. Stella Radnor shall win to-day, or my name isn't Harry Sands!"

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE BALL FIELD.

THE Bluffton fair-grounds, like the town itself, were beautifully arranged, the exhibition buildings being set apart by themselves, and the mile race-course by itself, inside of which ring was the local baseball inclosure—one of the finest grounds in the State, and supplied with a grand stand capable of seating several thousand people.

When High Hat Harry entered the gates, he saw that a tremendous crowd was present, seemingly the entire population of several towns. The grand stand was black with people, and circus seats having been built half-way around the border of the grounds, these two were crowded, beside which, many people were standing.

The Oceanic brass band was discoursing lively music out at the home plate, and members of the two clubs were playing catch to "get their hands in."

One club's uniforms were white pants, caps and stockings, and blue shirts; the others, white flannel shirts, blue fatigue caps, with gilt bands, and blue pants and stockings. As there were only eight members of the latter club, to nine of the Browns, on the field, Harry concluded that the white shirts were the Barmore club, who were awaiting his coming.

George Garrene and two-score keepers were also upon the ground.

High Hat Harry paused after entering the gate, and took a sweeping view of the situation before venturing out upon the grounds.

What a scene it was, indeed!

Thousands of excited, joyous and happy people, eagerly awaiting the result of a simple game of ball—every one, probably, with a choice of clubs, and hoping and expecting their choice to win.

And Harry Sands naturally could not help feeling a little nervous, for much depended upon him—much was no doubt expected of him by the club by whose efforts and skill a defeat of the Bluffton party was hoped for; much, by Stella Radnor, to whom he had promised victory.

"Well, it's die dog, or eat a couple of hatchets!" he mused, grimly, "and I might as well wade in, first as last. And I might as well inaugurate the ceremonies with a little monotony-killer."

Close beside him stood, among others, a very fat and extremely short little German, whom Harry caught gazing up at his neck.

"My friend!" Harry said, tapping him on the shoulder, "can you tell me the correct time?"

"Id vas yoost dree o'clock!" the German said, making no effort to look at his watch.

"What? So late as that!" Harry exclaimed, in mock astonishment, and then his neck began to stretch upward, nor did it cease to elongate until his chin was, seemingly, a good foot and a half above his shoulders. Then it gradually shrunk back to its normal length.

The Teuton started back with a horrified ejaculation, while the other immediate spectators burst into a roar of laughter and astonishment, for it was truly a wonderful anatomical feat.

Harry smiled benevolently at the wondering crowd and strode out upon the ball ground.

As he did so a ringing cheer went up from the assembled multitude and the Barmore boys ran forward with shouts and swung their caps in the air.

They were as handsome a lot of fellows as ever were formed into a club—all about of a size, clean-limbed, and generally athletic of build, and judging by the heartiness with which they greeted their new comrade they were first-class pards, without exception.

After a general introduction, Bondell, the captain, took Harry one side:

* Mr. Sands, it may be well to add, is no creature of fiction, but a personal acquaintance of the writer, and just as described—one of Nature's most marvelous freaks. Once "one of the boys," but latterly of a very retiring disposition, and sensitive of his deformity, he travels largely, and is one of the most expert "shadows" in the profession.

THE AUTHOR.

JNA

"We are very glad to get your services today, Mr. Sands," he said, "for I judge you are a player, and we need to play our best, as a large pile of money will change hands on both personal and general betting. I understand the Blufftons are the favorites, and therefore, my father, who is something of a sporting enthusiast, is taking all the bets he can get, two to one."

"Well?"

"Well, it follows that, if we win, it must be through your work—Maccaire, our best man, being sick; so if we carry the score it will be to your credit, and you can rely that it will be a good thing for your own pocket."

"Oh! that's all right. Who catches me?"

"I do. In that respect we have the advantage. You will, however, find it pretty hard to bat Streeter, for he is a lightning pitcher."

"I presume it will be a close game!" High Hat Harry said, running his eyes over the men critically.

"However, put your men on to one pointer: avoid as many errors as possible and all chances for a dispute or close decision, because Garrene is betting on the Blufftons and, I have heard, will favor them!"

"What? Why, Garrene pledged us that he would not make a bet either way but would give us impartial treatment!"

"Then he is a scoundrel, for he tried to buy me over, or intimidate me in front of the Oceanic bar this very morning!"

Bondell's face grew stern.

"This kind of thing won't work!" he said, grimly.

"Stop! Don't mention anything about it. Get your men together, one by one, and instruct them, and get ready to play. If you can catch me, and I've no doubt you can, I'll go down myself in the Atlantic if we don't beat the Spindles!"

"Good! Put her there!" And after a hearty handshake, Bob Bondell went about to marshal his men.

George Garrene approached the detective, who stood near the home-plate, sizing up the grounds—and admiring them, too, for they were perfection.

"Ah! ahem!—Mr. Sands," the sport began—"quite a pleasant day, sir!"

"Quite!" Harry replied, scarcely deigning him a glance.

"It is, indeed," Garrene went on, "and we have attracted the largest crowd ever known here—a handsome sum of money for both parties, as they share two-thirds and one-third according to who wins. By the way, Sands, I trust you will overlook that little—"

"Hey?"

That wonderful neck again stretched heavenward and Harry's face looked down one of those comical scowls.

"Why, sir," he added, "I have *nothing* to overlook."

Several of the Barmore boys were near, and overheard, saw, and comprehended, and they set up a laugh that reached the grand stand, from whence came back a responsive roar.

As for Garrene, he gave one unutterable look at the elongated neck, and "way-up" head, and quickly turned away with a fearful oath.

It was too much for him.

And by the time Harry's neck had dropped down to its easy position, the Bluffton baseball grounds were ringing with shrieks of applause and laughter.

It was plain enough that Harry had "caught on," and, at the same time, was regarded with great curiosity.

The game was called, and the Barmores went to the bat, Bondell leading.

High Hat Harry, coatless, but sporting that high silk tie, was fourth.

Streeter at once proved that he was a scientific pitcher, but Bondell made a base on him.

Malvern followed, and also made a base, pushing Bondell to second.

Ruthven, the third man, also gained a base, forwarding the others one each.

Three men on bases!

And High Hat Harry was next!

Interest now ran high.

Much was expected of this stranger, who had already impressed the most observant as being an individual of more than ordinary caliber.

Streeter, the most muscular fellow of the Blufftons, and quick and wiry, glanced over the field, before attempting to pitch.

His catcher, at first Rowan, was now changed.

Ira Ingle had been put behind the bat, Rowan going to second-base.

There was a peculiar gleam in Streeter's eyes as he turned to face High Hat Harry.

Harry saw it, and surmised at once that he meant mischief, for the stalwart Blufftonite could pitch a ball that was hard to dodge.

"Go ahead!" Harry said to himself. "I'm on to your little game!"

Whizz!

The ball came like lightning toward him, with a curve, that, had he not made a quick dodge, would have knocked the high hat fairly from his head.

Of course a shout of laughter escaped the spectators, and no runs were made.

The second ball was intended to be a repetition of the first, but utterly failed in its errand, for it caught a terrific sweep from High Hat Harry's bat, that sent it far beyond center-field!

And you may judge the Barmoreans fairly split their throats, when the three men came in from bases, and the young detective came trotting in on a home run.

The next man also struck to third base, and the next to second. Then the seventh man struck out, but the two men on bases stole home, making a total of six runs.

And there was applause.

High Hat Harry now took the ball, with Bondell behind the bat, and the other half of the innings begun; but it was no use.

The detective's scientific delivery of twist and curve balls could not be hit, and three men struck out in succession.

The second inning was a bad one all around, with a score of but one for each club.

The third inning yielded two runs each.

The fourth inning, with Sands at the bat, drew nearly every one upon the grand stand to their feet, and a howl both of applause and derision burst forth, as the detective's neck began to elongate, until in height he looked like a colossus.

Streeter did not appear so confident now as at the beginning; he had not been able to hit one of Harry's terrific curves, and clearly was out-generaled and dispirited.

A high ball was what Harry wanted, and no wonder, when his head was so far above his shoulders.

But he didn't get it.

Streeter was mad, and sent the ball skimming along but a few inches above ground.

Down came the head, and—

Down came the swooping bat, and it picked up the ball—lifted it high over the plates, and grounded it far beyond center-field!

While High Hat Harry, lifting his tile gracefully in his right hand, proceeded to deliberately *walk home!*

He reached third base ere the center-fielder secured the ball; then, as his feet continued to trot on toward the home-plate, his head swung directly around, as on a pivot, and watched the ball on its course toward second-base.

It was a wonderful sight to see a man going in one direction and his face turned precisely in the opposite, and those who witnessed the astonishing sight drew long breaths and refrained from giving vent to their applause.

Center-field sent the ball in direct to second-base, and he let it fly home—but too late.

Harry's foot touched the home-plate a second before the ball came whizzing in.

And his face and neck resumed their original positions, amid the wildest applause from the multitude.

Of course there were some who hissed, because they were now confident that they were going to lose; but their hisses were drowned in the tumult of new applause.

And as for the Bluffton boys, they were now nearly demoralized.

All, or at least much, depended on Streeter and Ingle, and they were plainly "rattled."

Seven runs were scored in the Barmores' half of the inning, while in the face of Sands's astonishing pitching the Blufftons scored but one run.

Barmores, seventeen; Blufftons, four!

It was indeed a hard outlook so early in the game; but, be it said to their credit, the Blufftons were gritty.

The result of the fifth inning was altogether different, but any one with eyes could see that the Barmores were confident of victory and not half-trying to play. Result: Barmores, two; Blufftons, seven.

The next inning Harry displayed some more amazing batting, sending his ball further than ever, the others playing light, to the Blufftons' phenomenally good-luck. Result: Barmores, four; Blufftons, eight.

The seventh inning was a "skunk" for the Barmores, one run for the Blufftons.

The excitement was now running high.

As matters looked, the Blufftons were pulling up, with a fair chance to win.

The Barmores seemed Irish, but were not working.

Over in the grand stand where the elite presided, matters were decidedly warm. Men were standing up—ay, and ladies, too—and yelling and altercation, and flourishing greenbacks about most promiscuously.

High Hat Harry noted the fact, and carefully looked over his men—his men, because he felt that on him—he was now at the bat—depended the result; not that he could do more than add one run to the score, but because if he won, it would mayhap encourage those to follow; if he lost, the chances were large they would lose their nerve.

Bondell was the only one who looked worried, and that was because his hands were badly swollen.

"Heavens! do these balls come out of a catapult?" he grimly inquired, in passing Sands.

"No! but if they didn't come as they have it would be a *cat*—astrophe for us," was the retort. "Spit on your hands, pull down your vest, and do as I do!" and with this sensible advice, he grabbed a club, and went forward to the plate.

Streeter smiled, faintly, as he adjusted his mask, and faced the only man he considered his superior. If the smile had been uttered, the sentiment would probably have been:

"I see the result, old boy, and am not going to kill myself for the sake of defeat."

And it looked like it.

The ball was an easy one to hit, and went sailing 'way off toward the further end of the grounds.

Not a move did Harry make, until the ball struck the ground, beyond the center-field man; then he started, and such running—such getting over space, the people never saw, within the scope of their remembrance.

He seemed to fairly fly around the diamond, and, as usual, came home ahead of the Reach.*

No applause came from the spectators—they were too interested and anxious—laboring as it were under a spell of sanguine hope, and fearful anxiety.

And, now, it became plainly evident, that the Barmores had been laying back "on their oars," with the full intention of playing, when they felt disposed to win.

For at the end of the eighth inning, the total of the game was: Barmores, 28; Blufftons, 23.

The Barmores came triumphantly in, to claim their victory.

George Garrene leaned sullenly against the catcher's dead wall, white with rage, but silent.

Ray Radnor, the captain of the Bluffton club, stepped forward, a trifle pale, but appearing in no wise irritated:

"Boys," he said, candidly, "it has been a very close game, and fairly won by the Barmores, although, upon my word and honor, I have observed an effort on the part of the umpire, to favor us, and—"

"What?"

George Garrene essayed to leap upon the speaker; there was a look of desperate fury in his eyes, but a hand caught him by the throat, and pushed him back against the dead-wall!

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER CONVERSATION.

It was High Hat Harry who clutched George Garrene by the throat, and hurled him back against the boards, for his quick eyes had noticed that the sporting man's right hand made a move toward his hip pocket as he lunged viciously forward.

"What do you mean, you rascal?" the young detective sternly cried, as Garrene recovered his equilibrium. "Do you forget yourself?"

Garrene stood for a moment, trembling with rage, as he surveyed the baseballist; then, his expression changed to cringing subserviency, and a look of assumed shame came over his dark face.

"You are right, sir—I did forget myself; and I thank you for fairly reminding me of it. Mr. Radnor, if I have in any way injured you or the interests of our opponents in the game—"

"Our opponents!" young Bondell quickly cried, as he stepped forward—"our opponents! Why, sir, that gives you dead away, and I tell you to your face that you are a blackleg, a scoundrel, and a cheat! If you want me to prove the falsity of the accusation, the diamond will furnish us ample scope for an exhibition of our pugilistic abilities, which no doubt the audience would enjoy!"

*The name of the champion ball.

"I do not care to bring censure upon myself by disgracing myself in a fight!" Garrene said, nervously.

"The game was won by you—although there is another inning to play—and so there is no necessity for any quarreling. I gave a fair and impartial decision, and had no interest in the winning of either club."

"You are a liar!" High Hat Harry declared. "Do you attempt to deny that you would buy me off or bar me out of the game? Do you deny that you attempted to assault me, because, for a few paltry dollars, I refused to sell out the game to you? Why, sir, you are a coward and a craven, and I give it to you in your very teeth; and the sooner you get out of Bluffton the better it will be for you."

"I'll not get out of Bluffton, to please you, nor any one else!" Garrene declared, defiantly. "I am not in the least afraid of any of you, but I am not inclined to disgrace myself by fighting. That is all I have to say."

Just then, two well-dressed, middle-aged men, came running up from in the direction of the grand stand.

They were flushed and excited.

"We want the last inning of the game!" one of them cried. "We have a large sum of money at stake, and we insist that you play the other inning."

The captains of the two clubs consulted, and then approached High Hat Harry.

"You will play, sir, I suppose?" Bondell asked.

"That depends largely on circumstances!" was the reply. "Irregardless of the result of the ninth inning, is it to be considered that the Barmores have won?"

"It is!" Bondell replied. "The Blufftons, through their captain, Mr. Radnor, have acknowledged their defeat. The ninth inning is simply a matter of interest to these two gentlemen."

"Very well. I will play, providing a suitable umpire is chosen."

After a few minutes of search a satisfactory umpire was selected, and the clubs got to their position.

The ninth and last inning was by far the briefest of the game.

The Barmores scored six runs, while the home team only got one, thanks to High Hat Harry's superior pitching.

Now, beyond the shadow of a dispute, the game was won by the Barmores, and a large amount of money changed hands ere the crowd left the grounds, while other wagers remained to be settled in private.

Immediately after the ninth inning was over, High Hat Harry resumed his coat and slipped away, as he supposed, unobserved, and started on foot for the Oceanic, for his arm was paining him considerably, and he had fears that he might lose the temporary use of it if it was not attended to promptly.

He had accomplished not more than half the distance, however, when he heard a team approaching from behind, and his name called.

He looked around to see Stella Radnor's pretty phaeton, stopping at the curb, and Stella, wreathed in smiles, was saying:

"Why, Mr. Sands, you really deserve to be chastised for running away so slyly. But you did not escape me, for I saw you leave the grounds and gave chase. So get right in here, and I'll drive you to the hotel."

"Why, really, Miss Radnor, I—"

"Oh! tut, tut! I know what you would say: that you are not in full dress, and therefore not presentable to the lady of the phaeton; but she thinks your dress very becoming. So hurry, and get in, for here comes Sylva Ingle's rig, and she intends to pass me—if she can!"

Harry glanced up the street, and saw another phaeton, drawn by a spanking span of bays, coming along at a stiff trot—the phaeton containing a young lady and gentleman, Carrol Cuthbert and Sylva Ingle.

So the Ingle had again triumphed, in securing the handsome Cuthbert's company!

Harry took a seat in Stella's phaeton, and she drove away leisurely.

It was evident that she had no intention of giving her horses free rein until the Ingle equipage had nearly or quite overtaken her.

And such was the case.

Stella kept her spirited creams at a moderate trot until the bays came up abreast with a spurt; then, with a quick "Hist!" she let out on the lines, and away went her horses, their heads stretched out and nearly on a level with their shoulders, and their ears laid back, as if they meant business.

Looking behind, Harry perceived that Sylva Ingle was urging on her team to their best

speed by application of the whip; but all to no use. The noble creams sped away like the wind, and were finally reined in in front of the Oceanic, a good square in advance of the Ingle pair.

"I told you as good as that I'd beat 'em!" Stella laughed, her starry eyes sparkling with excitement. "And now, remember, Mr. Sands,"—this as Harry got out of the phaeton—"I shall expect the honor of the first dance with you to-night."

"And if I am not too busied to attend the hop, I will try and accommodate you. I may attempt to do a little work to-night in my line of business, and if I do, the chances are that I will not be present at the ball. However, I will try to be there."

"Do so, and I will introduce you to some pretty young ladies." And with a smile, she drove away toward Radnor Ranch, while High Hat Harry at once sought his room in the hotel.

First taking a good bath, he thoroughly bathed his arm with liniment and soon had the satisfaction of feeling a decrease in the keen pain.

He then took a seat by the window overlooking the ocean, and for an hour, or more, devoted himself to reflection.

And while thus preoccupied, voices again came to his hearing, both of which he recognized.

"Yes, it has proved to be a shameful defeat, Mr. Garrene!" Sylva Ingle's voice proclaimed, "and you are not the only loser. Nearly all the people of Bluffton have been heavy losers, myself included. And it is all owing to the stranger."

"Curse him, yes! I could strangle him with a good grace!" Garrene hoarsely declared. "He has made himself entirely too fresh."

"That's what I say. What in the world ever brought him here?"

"I've got my opinion. He is not here, merely by chance!"

"Think not?"

"I am well satisfied not. He is an extraordinary individual, and as keen as he is extraordinary. In fact, it is my candid opinion that he is a detective!"

"A detective? What could a detective want in Bluffton? There is no crime here!"

Garrene laughed, cynically.

"I don't know about the exact amount of crime," he said; "but there might not be any crime at all, and still be room for detective work. You know there is the mystery of Captain Scuttle, and that alone, is worth solving."

"True, if there is anything in it. But, I am beginning to believe that Captain Scuttle is more a myth than anything else."

"Nonsense! Why, you have told me that you have seen him, and passed so near him that you know him to be a person of flesh and blood."

"So I did, but what of that? No one knows where Captain Scuttle keeps himself in the daytime, nor who he really is, for of course Scuttle is an assumed name. Then, too, if it be true that he and his said-to-be invisible crew, nightly descend into the sea and bring up gold from the sunken pirate ship, where does his crew keep themselves? They do not come ashore, for does not my demented uncle Ishmael patrol the beach from sunset till sunrise, in the vain hope that the ship may rise, come ashore and give him a chance to get some of the gold? I tell you, I believe that the Skull lies where she sunk years ago, and the gold is still there undisturbed, and is destined to thus remain, until some wrecking vessel takes hold of the matter."

Garrene made no reply for a moment; he probably was in meditation.

"You have no faith, then, in old Ishmael's prophecy that the Skull will rise to the surface on the 7th?" he finally asked.

"None whatever. Why should I? It is simply absurd. Ishmael is crazy, and everybody knows that. His insane declaration that he is in communion with the departed spirit of Paul Petrie—bah! what utter nonsense!"

"The old man may know more than he is given credit for knowing. There is Budd Blamphin who believes the old fellow not half as crazy as he is given supposed to be."

"Humph. Budd Blamphin is an ignorant boor—more of a brute than a human—and the ignorant are generally superstitious. Papa knows Ishmael's peculiarities as well as any one, and he has never had reason to suppose that he was other than a harmless lunatic."

"Has Cuthbert made known to you anything new in regard to his intentions?"

"Nothing particular. He said, to-day, that he had strong hopes that a stock company would

shortly be formed for the purpose of raising the vessel."

"Not likely, I guess!" Garrene returned, in a tone that indicated no wish to forward such an enterprise. "I've an idea, still, that if the vessel is ever raised, not enough money will be found on or in it to pay for the expense entailed."

"You still cling to the belief that much of the gold has already been recovered?"

"I do. And, betwixt you and I, I find fresh evidence of the fact nearly every day!"

"What have you learned, latest?"

"Well, you know, as I have previously told you, that many old Spanish coins had been passed at intervals, in this and adjacent towns. This, after I had learned the tradition of the pirate ship, proved to me that some person or persons already had access to the sunken treasure trove; so, like a sleuth-hound, I set to work. I got into society, met you, and enlisted your sympathies, and—"

"Sh! We may have listeners!"

"No. There are no people on the balcony, and I dare say not a room on this floor is occupied, as the people have hardly got in from the match yet. As I was saying, I enlisted your sympathies, on discovering your love for speculation and adventure, and from you, learned many details that helped me along. I set to work, and observation and information have assured me that this pirate ship coin is being gradually circulated, or rather, converted into United States currency, in this, and all adjacent towns."

"You don't say so!"

"Fact, I assure you. A couple of days ago the bank at Smithville received a hundred dollars worth of the old gold pieces, in exchange for greenbacks, and the person who procured the exchange, corresponds, in description, with a person in this town. To-day, a Spanish coin was exchanged with the proprietor of this hotel—and who do you suppose presented it?"

"I haven't the slightest idea!"

"Well, it was the very cuss who took hundreds of dollars out of our pockets to-day!" Garrene replied, with venomous emphasis.

"What! this fellow, High Hat Harry?"

"That very chap! And, therefore, you will see that his coming here, at such a time, is not purely by accident!"

"No! I don't believe it is; I now think he's playing some deep game."

"And being satisfied on that point," Garrene went on, "I propose to make it more than lukewarm for the rubber-necked rascal. I fancy hardly a person in Bluffton is particularly enamored of him, since he lost the game to us, and I am sure nearly all the club boys are set against him. So I will arrange to have Budd Blamphin order him to get out of the town, under penalty of forgetting where he was, at his last recollection. They all generally do pretty near as Budd says, too."

"I don't like that man!" Miss Ingle added. "He is so coarse and fierce that he is repulsive in my sight."

"Oh! you must get used to that. By the way, let me call your attention to one thing here—don't be *quite* so loving to Carrol Cuthbert; it's not necessary, you know. Of course, it is all well enough to do your part correctly, but do not be too extremely loving. It ain't according to Hoyle!"

"Ha! ha! ha! You silly goose, George! I hope you are not jealous! Why, you are silly! Who in all the world do I care for more than my dear, sweet Georgie?"

High Hat Harry, who had overheard the foregoing conversation, could have groaned just then, but he didn't.

"Oh! well, silly or not, don't get too fresh with him!" Garrene retorted, authoritatively. "Now, I guess I must be moving. I've some ideas to work up to-night."

"Wait a moment. You said the man who exchanged the gold in Smithville was a Blufftonian, or something to that effect. Whom do you suspect?"

"I will not mention names, but will say that three years ago a man came here from the West, purchased an elegant estate, and set himself up as a gentleman. He paid cash for all his property, after a residence here of less than six months, and apparently had plenty of money besides. Tracing him back to a mining city of the West, from where, I find, he came here direct, I have learned that, at the outside, he could not have had over ten thousand dollars when he set out for the East. As he paid twenty thousand for his present estate, where did he get the extra ten—and much more to live on—from? I presume you realize whom I mean?"

"Yes, indeed. You are a great detective, George!"

"Maybe I am. But keep close what I have said. You and I will yet enjoy the benefits of what is left of Paul Petrie's pirate fortune, by hook or by crook!"

Then the voices were heard no more, and High Hat Harry arose, and stepping out of his low-down window, sauntered leisurely along the balcony. As a result, he discovered that the room adjoining his was a private parlor.

It was now vacant, but there were wine glasses upon the marble table.

As he returned to his room, the baseball detective looked confident.

"I think I am fairly on the trail!" he muttered. "At any rate, the prospects grow brighter as the minutes fly. What I have learned, and what I know, make a good beginning."

CHAPTER VIII. CUTHBERT'S "SAY."

WHEN High Hat Harry went down to supper that evening, he was the target for many glances of the guests already assembled at the tables, and he heard more than one person make some remark about him, complimentary and otherwise.

He paid no attention to the slurs, however, but quietly ate his supper and went out upon the piazza to have a smoke.

Here, after he had become seated, he was approached by Carrol Cuthbert, who made bold to draw his chair near.

"You will excuse me," he began, "but curiosity has led me to ask you if—if you ever knew Miss Radnor prior to your arrival in Bluffton?"

Harry regarded him a moment, keenly.

"That is rather a pointed question," he responded, after a moment. "I might have known the young lady heretofore. Why do you ask?"

"Well—that is, you see, a matter of personal interest to me. I have been paying the young lady some attentions, and since you have come she appears to have turned the cold shoulder on me. I thought perhaps you might be able to afford me some little explanation."

"I don't know why you should have such an idea. I presume she manages her likes and dislikes without soliciting any outside advice; therefore, I could not reasonably expect to know why she gives you the cold shoulder," Harry coolly answered.

Cuthbert appeared nettled.

"Of course your coming to Bluffton must have something to do with it," he added, rather sullenly. "So, supposing I were to make you a liberal offer to pack up your traps and move on to some distant town, would you do it?"

"Most assuredly not! Why, you must be out of your senses."

"No, I am nothing of the kind. But you seem to be in the way of my further acquaintance, and I'll give you fifty dollars to get out of the town."

"Fifty dollars!"

"Exactly!"

"Well! well! Your offer is certainly magnificent—magnificent—to a startling degree! Where did you make a raise of so much money?" High Hat Harry asked, derisively.

At which Cuthbert arose, haughtily, his face flushed with anger.

"Sir, you are highly insulting, and I shall call you to account for those words."

"You will no doubt find me about when you want me!" and he smiled at the seemingly ludicrous idea.

Cuthbert strode away without another word.

"The cheek of the man to hire, or try to hire me!" Harry muttered. "That's the second attempt that has been made, and the people must look upon me as an article of traffic, ready to be bought, sold and speculated on at all times. They will all find out their grievous mistake, though, if they wait long enough."

About dusk he visited the local hardware store and purchased a pair of revolvers, together with the necessary cartridges, all of which he concealed about his person.

It was seldom that he wore weapons other than those natural ones with which nature adorned him; but he could foresee the possible need of such "tools" now, as would bite when they barked; for he had little doubt that an attempt would be made to "haze" him, or do something injurious to him, out of spite for his work in favor of the Barmore club.

That George Garrene was an arrant knave and villain he had not a doubt, while the conversation he had heard between him and Sylva Ingle was so significant that it gave him much food for thought.

Garrene and Sylva were lovers; or, at least Sylva was playing two parts; then, Garrene was

plotting to get possession of old Paul Petrie's fortune, with Sylva as an accomplice, and from what Harry had overheard, he was practically satisfied that the money, or much of it, had been raised from the vessel, and was now in possession of some resident who had but a few years before come from the West.

Then there was an alleged crazy person called Ishmael, who clung to the idea that the ill-fated Skull would rise to the surface the seventh day of July and then sink again forever—the same thing hinted at in Paul Petrie's last message, which the young detective now had in his possession. So it struck High Hat Harry that Ishmael must have some reason for expecting the Skull would arise on the seventh.

"About the first thing to do is to sound this Ishmael!" he mused, as he took his way toward the beach. "I may be able to learn something, if others cannot. Then, too, I must find whom Garrene suspects of having the gold. I think I have already an idea of the person he refers to."

When he reached the beach the moon was showing her face above the distant watery horizon.

Up at the Oceanic the band was beginning to discourse thrilling melody, and the hop would soon begin.

Upon the beach the waters dashed with the incoming tide, but there were no strollers.

The grim-faced fishermen sat in the doorways of their humble habitations, puffing away at their pipes, but seemed in no wise enthused over the beautiful and awe-inspiring panorama spread out before them.

Passing leisurely along the sandy portion of the shore, Harry at length came to where the smoother surface ended, and thence, for miles the coast was rugged, and soon became precipitous, and the waves lashed themselves into fury against the rocky barrier.

Here Harry had intended to end his stroll, but discovering what appeared to be a ledge-like path, running along the face of the bluff, some irresistible impulse caused him to move.

The path soon resolved itself into a dangerous affair by growing so narrow that only by leaping or clinging to spurs of outcropping rock, could progress be made.

After half an hour of this slow and dangerous adventure, but which he really enjoyed, the detective began to feel tired and turned to retrace his steps, when he made the somewhat startling discovery that three men had followed him along the giddy path, and were near at hand—men, dark and forbidding of aspect, whose leader was Budd Blamphin, the coast Terror!

It was certainly not a pleasant discovery.

Bluffton lay over a mile distant, and an appeal for help could only be heard and answered by the tide that surged and moaned, thirty feet below!

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLUFF RENDEZVOUS.

It needed no second glance for High Hat Harry to satisfy himself that the coming of the trio was an omen of evil to him.

They advanced along the path with a celerity and certainty of footing, that proved they were not strangers to the locality.

What was to be done?

This was the question that now presented itself to the hunted detective—for such he knew himself to be.

There was but one answer!

The face of the bluff was too steep for ascent; to retreat was impossible, for no two persons could pass, on that trail; to jump into the sea, meant sure death, either by drowning, or being hurled against the rocks with irresistible force; hence nothing remained but to advance, and that, too, into the face of unknown peril.

There was no time for anything except quick decision and to decide was to act; so he continued along the rim of rocky outcropping, while the waves surged and splashed below him, as if to warn him of their ceaseless watchfulness for their prey.

The pathway grew no wider or better defined; but on he made his perilous way. Long ago he knew he had left Bluffton behind him. As near as he could judge he must now be opposite either the Radnor or Ingleside properties.

He was wondering how long the chase would continue, when the path widened, somewhat, and directly, came to an abrupt ending, in the face of an out-jutting wall of rock.

Further passage, along the face of the bluff, was impossible.

To his left, the rocks were covered with a dense matting of creeping vines, and the ending

of the path, so abruptly, caused High Hat Harry to look about him, sharply.

Was there a possibility that he had been dogged to the end of the path, with no hope of escape, beyond jumping into the sea? Or was there a possibility that—that the vines covered some aperture, the entrance to a water-worn cave?

The thought caused him to part the vines.

Yes; there was an opening in the bluff, about the size and shape of an ordinary doorway. Where it led to, there was no means of ascertaining, for the densest of darkness reigned supreme within.

High Hat Harry had no time to consider this.

The aperture offered at least a temporary place of refuge, so he slipped into the excavation, if such it was, and then allowed the vines to spring back to their original position.

Then crouching behind them, he was able to peer out upon the moonlit ocean.

He drew his revolvers and waited.

Without knowing what secrets the darkness behind him might develop, he was resolved to look out for the front, and hold Budd Blamphin and his pals at bay.

Their footsteps soon sounded close at hand, and then Harry cried out sternly:

"Hold up, there! Advance another step at the peril of your lives! I am armed, and mean business!"

He heard Blamphin and the others stop, just out of sight, and consult in low tones.

"Oh! you'll have to give in," Blamphin called out, gruffly. "We've got you holed, and ef ye don't surrender you'll stay there till you starve."

"Never you mind about my starving," Harry replied. "You look out I don't get a chance to give you a taste of revolver, as I shall if you advance."

The words had scarcely passed his lips when he was seized from behind, and jerked down upon his back, and the weapons wrested from his grasp.

His assailants were four in number, and, in spite of his fiercest struggles, they succeeded in binding him, and then Blamphin and his pals were ordered to enter the cave.

A lantern was then lit, and High Hat Harry had an opportunity to view his captors.

They were all big, strapping fellows, slouchily dressed, and all were masked, with the exception of Budd Blamphin, the masks being made of dark cambric, and covering the entire face.

Blamphin appeared to be a ruling spirit among them, for he bent over the now corralled game, and glared at Harry triumphantly.

"So ye surrendered quicker than ye calculated on, eh?" he demanded. "Ye didn't know ye hed taken refuge in a hornets' nest, did ye?"

"Not exactly!" Harry replied, coolly. "If I'd not been surprised by the attack in the rear, I'll give you a pointer on one thing—you would never have captured me."

"Oh! wouldn't I? Well, that shows how much you know about it. Ye may be a very smart individual, an' fly wi' yer hands, but you'll find it was the unluckiest day of your life when you come to Bluffton."

"How do you make that out? What are you going to do with me?"

"Dunno. That's fer the capt'in ter say. He does the bossin', an' we do the executin', you see."

"Who is the captain? Is this a regular organized gang of outlaws?"

"Nary time! We're high-toned gentlemen, every one o' us. We're the Coast Scavengers. Ef a ship aire wrecked along this coast, and any stiffs are washed ashore, we takes care their wallybles sha'n't git lost. That's all. Heer comes the capt'in now."

Footsteps approached from some inner part of the cave, and the captain stood beside the prisoner.

He was a large, heavily-proportioned man, and was dressed not unlike the other members of the gang. A mask also completely hid his features from view, while his hands were incased in gloves.

He surveyed the prisoner in silence for several minutes, and High Hat Harry returned the stare with interest.

Of course he had no idea who the man was, but he wondered if—if it was not one of two men—George Garrene or Carrol Cuthbert.

True, going back to Garrene's conversation with Sylva Ingle, Garrene would not appear in the light of an outlaw, such as these men practically were; but then, the base-ball detective did not view the sport in the favorable light that most other people did; Garrene was none too good, in his opinion, to head the worst cutthroat gang in the country.

"Well, sir?" the captain demanded, in a tone that, it occurred to young Sands, was disguised. "What have you got to say for yourself?"

"To say for myself?" Harry retorted. "Why, I am not aware that I am called upon to say anything, in particular. You seem to be running the machine, so turn on the steam!"

"You have too much to say for your own good!" the captain declared, sternly. "It is known to us that you did not come to Bluffton by chance. You had a purpose in coming. We mean to find out what it is and make you talk to the point."

"Well, how do you propose to go about finding out why and wherefore I came to Bluffton?"

"In a simple way. You will be given a certain length of time in which to tell. If you do not then speak, you will be consigned to the mercy of the Atlantic!"

"Drowned, eh?"

"Certainly. Dead men tell no tales!"

"How long am I to have to prepare for my final briny bath?"

"Two hours. If you don't answer our questions, within that prescribed time, your doom is sealed. I don't know whether you have ever heard of me, or not, but, I am Captain Scuttle, and never go back on my word."

"Good trait, that!" Harry observed. "Suppose, when the two hours are up, I am rescued?"

The captain laughed, at the idea.

"No danger of that!" he declared, confidently. "The existence of this cave is not known outside of my band, and is not likely to be discovered, as there are few persons who care to run the risk of pitching down the cliffs, in order to trace the path to its end. Several prying chaps have tried it, only to meet their death. Their fate has been a sufficient warning to others. What tempted you to come here?"

"Curiosity, I suppose."

"Well, it will prove a dear old piece of curiosity to you, if you do not come to time."

"What do you want to know? All about what I don't know, in addition to the wisdom of the great men of past generations, and so forth? If so, I must refer you to standard history!"

"Nothing of the sort. It is known to me that you are a detective, and have come to Bluffton for a purpose. What did you come here for?"

"Humph! you have some queer ideas!" Harry said, coolly. "Why, if I were a detective, with an object in coming here, I fancy I'd hardly cast myself around so loosely as to get into such a predicament. I am a perennial tramp, going where I can turn in an honest penny. I hit Bluffton in time to get into a ball-game. As yet, however, I haven't seen any remuneration."

"That statement is all right so far as it goes, but it don't go far. What was in the bottle you got out of the water, about noon, to-day?"

"That's for me to know—and for you to find out—if you can!"

"Humph! Take care, and don't get too saucy, or you will get pitched into the sea sooner than you expect!"

"Pitch away! You might just as well do it first as last if you are going to do it at all."

"Nonsense! Don't think you will gain anything by bluffing, for you will not. Be reasonable. I have no desire to harm you, but shall have to if you remain obstinate. I am satisfied that you are a detective. Did you come here, with an idea of getting hold of the pirate fortune of old Paul Petrie?"

High Hat Harry did not answer, immediately. He was now aware that this band of grim, resolute men, suspected that he was after the fortune. If he denied the fact they would not believe him; if he made the admission—what then?

He hardly fancied he would receive any worse usage than if he persisted in denial.

It was evident that these Coast Scavengers, as Blamphin had called them, knew about the treasure, if, indeed, they were not banded together for the purpose of securing it or keeping others from doing so!

"Come!" Captain Scuttle said, making a motion with his hand. "Speak up!"

"Well, if it will do you any good to know," Harry replied, deliberately, "one object in coming to Bluffton was to look up the matter, and if possible, get possession of the sunken fortune."

"Ah! Then, you have more than one errand, in this vicinity."

"Yes."

"What was your other errand?"

"To find a criminal for whom a price is offered."

"Indeed! I suppose you've found him?"

"Maybe—maybe not. That's a matter foreign to this occasion."

"How did you find out about the treasure?"

"Humph! You might as well ask—has news any circulation, or gossip any scope?"

"So you read about it, eh?"

"Most likely, and heard about it, too."

"And you came here, imbued with the idea that you were smart enough to secure it?"

"You bet!"

"Then you are just the man we want! Boys, raise the prisoner and carry him to my office."

The Scavengers obeyed. All hands united in raising High Hat Harry, horizontally; then the captain seized the lantern, and the procession moved.

The foregoing conversation had taken place just within the natural cave, near the vine-shrouded entrance, but the passageway was, seemingly, hewn out of solid rock. It ran inland a few feet, then turned to the right, parallel with the coast, to a chamber, fully thirty feet square, and now lighted by several lanterns, suspended from the ceiling.

This room had passages running off, in several directions, into one of which the procession finally entered, and soon arrived in a second chamber, not as large as the first one.

Here High Hat Harry was seated in an arm-chair; then, at a motion from Captain Scuttle, the Scavengers retired as they had come, and Scuttle closed and locked a ponderous door after them.

Another narrow passage branched off from the room, and after depositing the lantern on a table, near which High Hat Harry was seated, the captain disappeared into this passage.

Harry then had an opportunity to inspect his surroundings.

This subterranean room was about twenty feet long by eighteen broad, and ten high, and clearly, had been formed by the work of hand, hammer, powder and chisel, as walls and floor were solid rock.

Both entrances were provided with heavy oaken doors, with strong locks.

The room was carpeted with heavy mats, the furniture, consisting of chairs, a writing-table, a couch, and a sideboard, were of solid walnut, while the walls were beautified with valuable pictures and bric-a-brac!

It was certainly a cosy place, and one most romantic, considering that it was located in the heart of the gigantic bluff.

As Harry's hands were bound behind his back and his feet strongly secured, there was nothing for him to do but remain seated and gaze about him.

He had naturally expected that Captain Scuttle would return without delay, but such did not prove to be the case; the minutes dragged by, and Scuttle did not put in an appearance.

All of which occurred to High Hat Harry as quite strange.

What had become of him?

Had he purposely absented himself for the period of the two hours, and would the Scavengers come at the expiration of that time to execute the sentence?

He was turning the matter carefully over in his mind, when a key turned in the lock of the door Scuttle had recently closed, the door opened, and a man stepped cautiously into the room. But it was not the captain.

CHAPTER X.

ISHMAEL.

Of course High Hat Harry was surprised, for he saw that the new-comer was no one that he had ever seen before, nor did he, apparently, belong to Captain Scuttle's band.

He was a man considerably past fifty years of age, and although he had once been of good figure, he was now bent as with infirmity, and walked with a gnarled cane.

His straggling beard and hair would have been white, if cleaned of stains, and his eyes were small, keen and piercing.

He wore no foot-covering whatever; his garments were old, and bat he had none.

He paused, when within the door, and looked about the room, sharply.

"I'll bet a cent ag'in' a centipede that's the chap Garrene and Sylva called Ishmael!" was High Hat Harry's quick conclusion. "He looks as if he were off his base!"

The old man hobbled forward, and paused within a few feet of the prisoner, at whom he gazed steadily, and searchingly.

So prolonged grew his stare, without speaking, that it grew monotonous.

"Say, old Neptune, d'ye see anything green?" Harry finally demanded.

There was no answer, but the old man ad-

vanced, and passed his hand down over the detective's face.

Then, he retreated a few paces, and surveyed the prisoner, as searchingly as before.

"Well I'll be darned!" Harry commented. "I've often heard of phrenology being practiced on the head, but didn't know it took in the face. Say, look here, old chap, what's your racket? Haven't you got any tongue?"

The only answer was an affirmative nod.

"Oh! you have got a tongue, eh? Then, why the blazes don't you use it? Are you the chap they call Ishmael?"

Another affirmative nod.

"Humph! I thought so!" Harry declared, seeing it devolved upon him to say what was said.

"You look as if you were crazy, or something of the sort. Say, just come and remove the cords from about my wrists, and I'll be your great-grandfather!"

Ishmael shook his head negatively.

The next minute, however, he glided across the room with surprising quickness, and listened at the entrance to the passage, in which Captain Scuttle had disappeared; then, he came back to where Harry was seated, and uttering a discordant laugh, began to go through the prisoner's pockets, as systematically as though he had been used to that sort of thing all his life, but never uttering a word.

"Oh! you old rascal!" Harry exclaimed.

"You're a kleptomaniac, are you? What do you expect to find, I wonder?"

Ishmael made no reply, but found two things that appeared to interest him.

The first was a U. S. detective's badge, which he eyed suspiciously; the second was the document which Harry had found in the bottle.

This the old man perused with visible excitement and satisfaction, and then thrust it in his pocket, and hobbled from the room, locking the door after him.

"Well, if that ain't the essence of time-hardened cheek, I don't know what is!" Harry ejaculated, in astonishment. "The old duffer ain't half so crazy as he lets on, I'll bet! What does he want of that paper? He evidently knows something about the Petrie fortune!"

At this juncture he heard footsteps approaching, and Captain Scuttle re-entered the chamber, and seated himself at the table opposite High Hat Harry, saying:

"Sands, I have been deliberating on what had best be done with you, while I was away."

"So? Well, what conclusion did you arrive at?"

"This. It won't do to let you have your liberty, except on certain conditions. As you no doubt have concluded, I have on foot a movement to secure the pirate treasure. The men who constitute my band are oath-bound to stand by me and do my bidding, for which service they are to have a share of the fortune. There has, somehow, got about in Bluffton a rumor of such a thing as a Captain Scuttle and his band being in existence, but as the rumor has never received confirmation, thanks to our carefulness, we are generally considered to be a myth; and so, as long as we are thus considered, it behooves us to take every precaution to avoid exposure."

"Well?"

"Well, you see that it would not be policy to let you go free, as you would give us away, and bring the law on us."

"If you are merely and only a band of men associated for the purpose of recovering the treasure, and have nothing more criminal to answer for, what would the law want with you?"

"Well, you see this coast has a hard name for wreckers, and were we found out we would get the unpleasant benefit of the charge. Some of my men have a name in that line, and although I have never been connected with that sort of business, we'd all be counted of one class were we found together. So it is evident you cannot leave here until you are an oath-bound member of the band!"

"Indeed!"

"Precisely. In order to have your freedom in the outer world, you will have to take an iron-clad oath of allegiance to me and my band as long as we exist as a band; and you will have to do something more than that."

"What?"

"You must, to cement the compact, marry my niece!"

"Marry your niece!" Harry echoed, in astonishment.

"Exactly—that is, marry her in name; for, after the ceremony you will not set eyes on her again until we have recovered the fortune. Understand, you will not see her face when you

marry her; but I assure you she is a pretty, well-educated and a most desirable young lady. When we have secured the fortune, and you and I have equally divided our share—for my men will get but a small portion—you and your bride shall formally meet, and if you conclude the match is satisfactory, you will of course live together. If not, you can easily get a divorce, and go your own way, free and a rich man."

High Hat Harry listened in astonishment. It was a puzzle to him!

"This is a most extraordinary proposition!" he said, as soon as he could think of anything to say. "The idea of my joining an outlaw gang is out of the question, and as for marrying some person unknown to me—why, I couldn't think of such a thing!"

"Well, it's your only chance. As for joining outlaws, as you put it, you would be doing nothing of the kind, but would in reality be my partner, with little to do except to keep the secret of the existence of the band, and likewise what may hereafter be revealed to you. As for my niece, you would be apt to value her highly were you to meet her in society."

"Supposing I had not found this secret cave?"

"You would not have been molested, so far as we are concerned, nor would you have ever got a show at Paul Petrie's fortune."

"And in case I do not come to your terms?"

"There is a dungeon in these rocks, prepared by me, in which, if you do not accede to my terms, you will be imprisoned and kept there on a diet of bread and water, and in total darkness, until the fortune is secured and removed far from this point. It may take a day, a week, a month, or a year. If the latter, you would be blind as a bat when you are set at liberty. You can, therefore, see which is your best move. I will go now and come back in one hour for your answer," and so saying, High Hat Harry's strange captor arose and left the chamber.

When he was gone the young detective drew a long breath.

"Well, I'll be hanged if I ain't in one nice scrape!" he soliloquized, grimly. "I've either got the choice of being shut up indefinitely in a dark dungeon, or to swear allegiance to this Captain Scuttle, and marry his niece, and take a hunk of Paul Petrie's fortune, providing it is ever recovered. He said it might be a day or a year. Now, the question is, what's a feller going to do in such a case? I'm a prisoner fast enough, and am very likely to remain so unless I come to terms. Let me see. Bread and water for a year! Not much! I'd starve on that sort of grub. On the other hand, the idea of marrying some girl I know nothing about—that don't set well on my conscience. Who knows—Captain Scuttle's niece might be a she-dragon; there's no telling. And who the blazes is the captain? A while ago an idea occurred to me who he might be, but one remark from him discouraged that notion."

It was an unpleasant thing for him to attempt to decide what to do, but after most careful deliberation he decided to come to the captain's terms and make the best he could of the matter.

He would go through the form of marriage with the girl, and if, when he came to see her, she was not to his taste, he could obtain a divorce on the ground of compulsory union and fraud.

As he was to get a share of the fortune, when it was recovered, by accepting the terms, the chances were that his venture might not turn out so badly after all.

Should he try, like others, to angle for the fortune on his own account, he might not accomplish anything at all, considering the odds against him.

At the end of an hour Captain Scuttle returned.

"Well, sir!" he demanded, "what conclusion have you come to?"

"I have about made up my mind to accept your terms!" High Hat Harry answered. "But before settling that point, I'd like to ask you a few questions: Were you acquainted with Percy Petrie, the pirate's son, and only surviving human who came ashore, when the Skull was sunk?"

"I have heard of him."

"He mysteriously disappeared, after he grew up, and married?"

"So I understand."

"Were no tidings ever found of him?"

"I might be able to offer you some data, later, but not at present."

"What became of Petrie's wife?"

"She went West."

"I hear that her son has come to Bluffton, to lay claim to the fortune!"

"A fellow by the name of Cuthbert has. It has not been clearly proven, yet, that he is Percy

Petrie's son. In fact, I'll stake my life on it that he ain't. I know he ain't!"

"Ah! then—"

"Ask me no more, at present. You can go back to Bluffton, as soon as you make oath. The marriage ceremony I will postpone till to-morrow night."

The oath was then administered, and, once taken, Harry knew he was in sacred duty bound to keep it.

He was then allowed to leave the cave, and return via the narrow path to Bluffton.

CHAPTER XI.

BANQUETED.

WHEN High Hat Harry got back to Bluffton, the evening was well advanced toward midnight.

The hop was not yet over, for soft throbbing strains of music came floating from the Oceanic ball-room, and the hotel was ablaze with light.

Harry hurried up-stairs, hoping to escape to his room, but he was not that lucky, for he was intercepted, in one of the broad hallways, by the very one he had hoped to avoid meeting—Stella Radnor, who was promenading, leaning on the arm of a portly man, of military aspect—a man with keen gray eyes, iron-gray hair and close-cropped beard.

"Oh! Mr. Sands!" Stella cried, breaking away from her escort and running up to Harry, impulsively—a vision of rare loveliness she was, in her exquisite toilet of white satin, lace, and flashing jewels. "What a naughty fellow you have been, to be sure, not to come to the ball, before; and I do believe you were aiming direct for your room with the intention of giving us the slip."

"There was just where I was aiming for!" Harry declared, with a smile. "I have been too busy to attend the ball, Miss Radnor, and being considerably fatigued, I was about to retire!"

"Tut! tut! Nothing of the sort, is he, Mr. Bondell? This is Mr. Bondell, of Barmore, Mr. Sands."

The two gentlemen shook hands; then, Stella said:

"Now, you must come right along with us, Mr. Sands. There are some friends of yours in Parlor C, who have been waiting to see you all the evening."

"Friends of mine?"

"Why, to be sure—the Barmore boys!"

And before High Hat Harry could refuse, or excuse himself, Stella had pulled him into a luxurious reception parlor.

Here, seated at a long table, were the Barmore players, and a number of other young people of both sexes, only two of whom, however, were Blufftonites—Ray Radnor and his "company."

The table was filled with fruits, confections and other delicacies, while at each plate was a bottle of champagne.

A shout of approval went up at High Hat Harry's entrance, and he and Stella and Mr. Bondell were at once provided with seats at the table.

Then there was a gay and festive time of singing, joking and toast-offering, which lasted for an hour.

Harry was the conceded lion of the hour, and all present evinced the greatest friendship for him.

Of course Sylva Ingle and Carrol Cuthbert were not present, nor George Garrene, either, for that matter; but there was no reason to expect they would be.

Had the revelers taken the pains to investigate, they might have learned that their jollifications were observed by three persons who, standing outside on the balcony, had an uninterrupted view of all going on within the parlor through the lace curtains.

These three persons were Garrene, Cuthbert and Silva.

When the festive reception to High Hat Harry had progressed for an hour, Mr. Bondell arose.

"Mr. Sands," he said, "it gives me pleasure that the members of the Barmore club have received you so generously and genially, for I am satisfied you are worthy of their enthusiasm. It gives me greater pleasure, however, to announce that, so well pleased were the people of Barmore to-day with the result of the game—for which you were largely responsible—that they made up a purse and delegated me to present it to you as a token of their esteem for you and appreciation of your services."

As he finished speaking, he laid upon the table in front of Harry a plethoric wallet, which looked as if it might contain a small fortune.

To say that the detective was overwhelmed

with commingled surprise and gratitude would be "drawing it mild," and as soon as he could command his voice, he arose and responded in a neat and fitting way, that drew forth a cheer.

The party then broke up, and Stella drew Harry away into the ball-room, and they were soon eddying around in the midst of the brilliant throng of dancers.

And about an hour afterward, two men were seated facing each other at a table in one of the upper rooms of the hotel.

Wine and glasses were before them; the gas was turned low, for the moonbeams shone in through the open casement.

The men, as may be surmised, were George Garrene and handsome Carrol Cuthbert.

Both were smoking, and neither looked to be in a particularly pleasant mood.

"It's just as I expected when the fellow made his appearance here!" Garrene growled. "He's a detective, and he is here for a purpose. If we don't find ourselves handcuffed unexpectedly, I'll lose my guess!"

"Oh, I don't know. I took the fellow to be a wandering sharp, rather than a detective. I don't believe, even if he is a detective, that his being here has anything to do with us. It appears more likely to me that he is some nameless adventurer, drawn here through hearing of the Petrie treasure."

"Even so, he is in our way, for I have sized him up as one of these sly cusses who say little and find out much. At this stage of the game, when prospects are fair that we will accomplish our object, it won't do to have any such observing individuals flourishing about too promiscuously."

"Pshaw! you're unduly suspicious. I fail to see where our fair prospects are concerned. You have settled nothing definite, yet."

"I've settled one thing—that is, I have settled it to my satisfaction that the bigger share of Paul Petrie's fortune is no longer at the bottom of the sea, but is in possession of a resident of this place, who is, as fast as possible, converting the old Spanish coin into Uncle Sam's money."

"Well, I am sorry to say I don't believe anything of the kind. Why, how in the deuce could that gold be raised without the people knowing about it?"

"Submarine divers can accomplish wonders, of a dark night!" Garrene replied, significantly.

"Well, if Rescoe Radnor has got the fortune," Cuthbert said, slowly, "you may rest assured that he's got it put away where we won't finger it."

"Nonsense! Once we ascertain that he has got it, it will be easy enough for you to recover it—for are you not Paul Petrie's only lineal surviving heir?"

And here Garrene smiled, grimly.

"That goes all right, so far as the Bluffton people are concerned," Cuthbert replied, "but, when it came to pushing the matter into court—"

"Bah! nonsense! Do I not have Pauline Petrie's death confession, and, as an attorney, did I not execute it; and didn't I hunt up her son, who had been absent two years? Why, to be sure! You are Percy and Pauline Petrie's son—of course you are!"

"That's all well and good so far as it goes!" Cuthbert said, doubtfully. "But, suppose, for instance, my double should turn up?"

"Suppose nothing! Didn't I make a diligent search for him, without success? The fellow, I learned, had a strong affection for his mother, and if he were alive, he would not have stayed away from her two whole years without letting her know his whereabouts. In my candid opinion he is dead. But, what if he ain't? As long as we get the fortune he can whistle!"

"But if he should turn up before we get the fortune?"

"Well, in that case, you can bet he won't come to stay!" Garrene assured significantly.

Cuthbert was silent a few minutes. The expression of his countenance seemed to indicate that he was not as sanguine of the success of their schemes, as Garrene was. Garrene was the more ambitious and bold of the two villains, and Cuthbert in reality was but his tool and emissary.

"Well, I'm sure I hope matters will shape some way, pretty soon," the handsome man said, finally, "for I'll be blamed if we are not running large risks. I'm sorry we had anything to do with the Ingle girl, for she is a regular sticking-plaster."

"You seem to do the agreeable toward her nicely."

"It's not because I admire her. I don't see as anything is to be gained."

"Oh! don't be impatient. I've got her under my thumb, and shall work wonders with her, yet. Besides she has been a source of considerable information to us already."

"Pooh! We could easily have learned as much from other sources. Does she suspect that we are connected in the scheme to get possession of the fortune, and that I am not the real Carroll Cuthbert?"

"Of course not. She thinks we are chance acquaintances, each working individually, to one end."

"Ah! I see. She is playing a double string. If I win, she means to be solid on my side; if you win, *vice versa*."

"Yes. That's her idea. You'd better keep in with her, and thus keep her on our side. If we can't get rid of this fellow, Sands, any other way, I may induce her to lay a charge of blackmail against him, and thus get him locked up. By the way, why don't you succeed better with the Radnor girl? If the old man should prove to have the fortune, it might be necessary to wed the girl, in order to find where the gold is secreted."

"Hang it, she is not inclined to have anything to do with me since this man Sands has come. Before that, I could have sworn she was dead in love with me."

"Jest so! There's another potent reason why the rubber-necked rascal should be put out of the way. He is no doubt turning the girl's mind against you."

"Perhaps it might startle you if I were to express an opinion about this Sands."

"Bah! I'm not so easily startled. Out with it!"

"Well, I've an idea that he's the real Carroll Cuthbert—otherwise Philip Petrie."

Garrene burst into a boisterous laugh.

"What a nonsensical idea!" he declared. "That thing the real heir? No, sir—ce! Don't let that worry you in the least. But, be he whoever he may be, the sooner we get him out of the way, the better."

"Well, if so, you must take charge of the matter yourself. I've got all on my hands I care for."

"Very well. I'll fix the Aleck afore morning, maybe," Garrene declared, darkly. "See that you try to get back into the graces of Stella Radnor."

"Very well. But, in the mean time, where's the lucre to come from? I'm dead broke."

"Ditto here. That infernal ball-game cleaned me out. By the great Jupiter, I could kill the fellow Sands with a hearty good will. Can't you work the Ingle for more cash?"

"I dare not. I'm deep in her debt now—got a lift only a few days ago."

"Well, I'll see. I expect I can manage to get hold of some money before the night is out. Are you off?"

"Yes, I think I'll go to bed."

"All right. I shall probably not get much rest."

Soon after Cuthbert's departure, Garrene left his room and went down-stairs to the office of the hotel.

Here he scanned the register for awhile.

Then, after getting a drink without paying for it, by using the excuse that he had nothing about him except a large bill, he once more went up-stairs.

A glance into the ball-room assured him that High Hat Harry was there, dancing with Stella.

"Good!" he muttered. "I'll have some lucre to-night from one source or another, or my name is not George Garrene. Dance on, Mr. High Hat Harry! I can wait for you! Don't let one thought of trouble enter your mind until the trouble comes. Then it will be time enough to squeal."

And the villain laughed diabolically as he went on up-stairs.

CHAPTER XII.

OLD ISHMAEL'S REVELATION.

THE happenings of that night are not yet all chronicled. It was long after midnight, when High Hat Harry surrendered pretty Stella Radnor to the charge of her brother, who was to escort her back to Radnor "Ranch."

They had danced together, chatted together, and strolled together, upon the moonlit balcony, and when he sought his room Harry could have admitted, without a conscientious scruple, that the fair belle of Bluffton had made a deep and lasting impression upon him.

He did not know for certain, but somehow believed that his attentions had been as agreeable

to her as her society had been to him, and then—to mar the pleasurable thoughts that filled his mind, there arose before his eye a vision of the unknown girl he had pledged himself to marry—the niece of Captain Scuttle!

"Confound the luck!" he muttered; "something's always going crosswise, with me. Who knows but I might win the fair Stella if it were not for this other affair? Just my luck to get entangled in some scrape detrimental to my interest!"

He had taken a solemn oath, however, and knew it was useless for him to think of backing out. He was in for it, and there was no necessity for fretting or wishing, as it could do no good.

Before going to bed, he counted the contents of the purse given him by the Barmore people, and found that it contained exactly one thousand dollars—a very handsome sum, indeed, for one afternoon's work!

Restoring the wallet to his pocket, with many feelings of gratification, Harry threw himself upon the bed without undressing; he really was too wearied for that.

He soon fell soundly asleep, but suddenly awoke with a consciousness of danger. Attempting to rise, he found that his hands and feet were tightly pinioned, and, in addition, he was tied down to the bed, so that he could not even rise to a sitting posture.

Standing over him, was a man muffled up in a somber cloak, and wearing a full black mask, and a hat slouched low over his forehead. He held a revolver in his right grasp, in a way that seemed menacing.

"Ha! You are awake, eh?" he demanded, as soon as High Hat Harry opened his eyes.

"Well, see that you make no outcry or attempt to attract attention, if you don't want me to spatter your brains all over the bed."

"Who are you, and what do you want?" demanded the decoyed detective.

"Oh! I'm just an ordinary tramp—that's all. I heard you'd a boodle, and being hungry, I came, saw, and conquered. I've got your wallet, and a feast lays in store for me, you bet! S'pose you've no objections?"

"None whatever!" Harry retorted, with sarcasm, "only I don't calculate your chances of enjoyment will be quite so huge, when I get free!"

"Ha! ha! You're talkin' cross-eyed, now. You don't know me, nor will you ever see me again, when I bid you a last affectionate farewell."

"We shall see about that!" Harry gritted.

"Oh! certain. You can see, as much as you please, my friend!" the robber assured, complacently. "I shall not blindfold you. I am aware that you are a detective, but that don't scare me a particle. I've dodged detectives all my life. So along! Long-neck—many happy days to you." And with a mocking laugh, the robber strode from the room, locking the door after him.

For some time, High Hat Harry lay in silence, undecided what course to pursue.

He was roped down to the bed in such a way, that he could not escape.

He detected an odor of chloroform in the room, which accounted for the easy manner in which he had been captured.

One thing puzzled him—who was the robber? In vain he had tried to remember if he had heard the voice before, but could not. It was altogether strange and unfamiliar, and Harry concluded that it was also natural and undisguised.

The house was quiet by this time. The music had long since ceased, and every one, apparently, was in bed.

Therefore, Harry was undecided what to do. Should he make an outcry, and arouse the inmates of the hotel? Or, should he lie where he was, until daybreak?

He finally decided that the latter was the best thing to do, and so composed himself as best he could.

An hour passed, when Harry became aware that he was to have another caller.

The key turned gently in the lock; then the door swung open, admitting a person, who, after softly closing the door, approached the bedside, and Harry recognized his visitor—old Ishmael!

The old man surveyed the bound detective a few minutes, in silence; then spoke:

"Who did this?" pointing to the ropes.

"Humph! You tell me, and I'll tell you!" Harry replied.

"Some individual came in here, chloroformed me, as I slept heavily, and after binding me, took possession of my pocket-book, and vamoosed!"

"Who was he?"

"Give it up! He was cloaked and masked beyond recognition."

The old man spoke no more, for a time, but drew a keen edged sheath-knife from his pocket, and ran his thumb lightly over the edge.

This struck Harry as being rather unpleasantly significant.

"See here, old feller, what's your racket, now?" he demanded. "Are you going to carve me, or do you propose to liberate me?"

Ishmael made no reply, but chuckled softly.

Coming closer to the bedside, he seized hold of the detective's right arm, at the wrist, and deliberately proceeded to rip open his coat-sleeve, not pausing until it was open to the shoulder!

Then, he unbuttoned the shirt-sleeve, and bared the arm, until the knotty muscle of the ball-pitcher was exposed to view.

But that was not all that was to be seen for the looking.

Upon the arm just below the elbow, was a scarlet birthmark, in the shape of a human hand. The hand, from its beginning at the wrist, to the tips of the finger-nails, was perfect in all respects! An artist could scarcely have produced a more natural one on paper!

Old Ishmael regarded this a few minutes attentively; then turned his withered visage toward High Hat Harry.

"It is as I thought!" he announced. "You are the genuine, and the other is an impostor. You are Percy Petrie's son!"

"How do you know?"

"By that birthmark. It was there, the same as now, when you were born."

"Did you see me just after I was born?"

"I did. You are the grandson of Paul Petrie, the pirate, whose fortune lies out yonder in the ocean."

"Correct! Your head is level, on *that* point. I am the son of Percy and Pauline Petrie. But, as you seem to know so much about me, tell me what was my father's fate?"

Old Ishmael hesitated a moment, then pointed oceanward.

"Out there!" he said—"deep down among the ruins of the wreck. But I will explain. People say I am crazy, but I am not; I am heart-broken. Your father and I were close friends. Two men could never be more attached to each other than we were. We grew up to manhood together, and laid our plans for recovering the fortune."

"In the dead of night, when others slept, we were out upon the water at work. Shortly after your birth, and after months of experiment, we located the sunken Skull."

"Next we supplied ourselves with the necessary diving apparatus, and, one dark night, we went out upon the ocean to test the report regarding the sunken treasure. Your father was a daring fellow, and made no hesitation about going down. The diving-suit was supplied with the requisite lengths of air-tube and signal-ropes and when necessary to rise, all that was needed was for your father to cast off his ballast and he would come to the surface."

"Well, I manned the pump that forced the air down to him, and he dropped below the surface. He carried enough ballast to sink him at moderate speed, and you may guess I watched the air-tube play off the reel, until he reached bottom, with great anxiety. I worked the air-pump vigorously, and waited for a jerk of the signal-rope."

"Before he went down, Percy made me solemnly promise that, should his venture prove fatal, I would never, in any shape or manner, betray to any one what had become of him. And, until this time, I have sacredly obeyed his instructions!"

"Well?"

"Well, I finally felt a jerk at the rope, and stopping my work at the pump, I laid to the rope with a will. I thought it pulled awful easy, but reckoned he had cast off all his ballast and was coming up on his own hook. Great heavens, you may imagine my surprise when the last of the rope came up, and I saw it was not attached to the diver."

"Instantly I seized the tube and pulled that up, only to find that it had been cut off near the connection with the head-piece. Percy was down in the wreck, dead, and at the mercy of the fishes. It is probable that a sword-fish severed both the tube and rope."

The old man betrayed considerable emotion as he finished speaking, and it occurred to Harry that he had been giving the facts of the case without any attempt at deception.

"Well, this is sad news!" the young man said, "and yet I am glad to hear it, for it clears up the mystery of my father's fate. Do you believe the gold is still in the ocean?"

"Why do you ask?" Ishmael quickly demanded.

"Oh! because you know some one might have raised it already."

"If any one has, Captain Scuttle is the man, but his gang knows nothing of it!" Ishmael declared, significantly. "But, in my opinion, the gold is still under water."

"Who is this Captain Scuttle?"

"You will probably find that out all in good time. I can tell you no more now. I must be going. I will release your hands, and you can finish freeing yourself!"

The keen-edged knife severed the cords that confined Harry's wrists; then, without another word, old Ishmael turned and quitted the room, closing the door behind him.

Without much trouble, High Hat Harry succeeded in freeing himself.

"The cat's out of the bag now!" he muttered, "that is, if Ishmael gives me away. So I must prepare myself to put on the finishing touches."

He took the detective badge from his pocket, and fastened it to the inside of his vest. Then, opening his sachel, he brought forth a legal-looking document, glanced it over, and placed it in his pocket.

The intervening time, till daybreak, was occupied in sewing up his coat-sleeve.

CHAPTER XIII.

TROUBLE FOR THE RADNORS.

As early as sunrise the next morning the town of Bluffton was thrown into a state of consternation and excitement by the announcement that Roscoe Radnor had, at daybreak, been found dying in the road, midway between his residence and the village, in an insensible condition, and shockingly cut and bruised about the head and body.

A party of laborers had found him, and, believing him dead, had carried him home.

A physician had been quickly summoned, who, after a careful examination, pronounced the wounds not at all serious, insensibility having been produced by a blow on top of the skull, with some blunt instrument—probably a loaded cane. He dressed the wounds, and said there would be nothing to prevent Mr. Radnor from moving about the house.

This much Harry learned at the breakfast-table, for the great dining-room was full of gossip about the affair.

It appeared that Mr. Radnor had not arrived at the Oceanic until midnight, and had not danced at all, something unusual for him.

Instead, he had joined a little poker party, in one of the private parlors, and when the Radnor carriage was ready, at three, he was not ready to depart, and said he should probably not be home until daylight, when he would return on foot.

He had left the Oceanic before daylight, however, and it was supposed he had gone home.

It had not yet been ascertained, at Bluffton, whether he had been robbed, or not, but everybody seemed to regard it as a probability that he had.

For, what other object could the assailant or assailants have had?"

High Hat Harry thought the matter carefully over, as he sat on the piazza of the hotel, smoking a cigar. His robber had not touched the money in his pants pockets, taking only the wallet.

He remembered the mystery still surrounding the previous attack on Mr. Radnor, and doubted not that the parties of this last assault were the authors of the previous one.

"I wonder if I were to offer my services if they would be accepted?" he mused. "And, then, again, I wonder if I could lay my hand on the guilty ones who did the job?"

Garrene and Carrol Cuthbert were both around the hotel, seeming to be taking things perfectly cool and easy, and looking the least like men who had recently committed any criminal act. Their composure was perfect.

"Garrene's the man, if either of the two had a hand in the job!" Harry decided; "and the chap who robbed me, is, without doubt, the same one who slugged Mr. Radnor. I should quicker think of looking to Budd Blamphin, I fancy, than Garrene."

While he was thus communing Stella Radnor's phaeton drew up in front of the Oceanic, with the arch and pretty Stella in charge of the reins.

Harry at once descended the steps, politely raising his hat.

"I want you to ride home with me, Mr. Sands!" Stella said, hurriedly. "Papa wants to see you."

High Hat Harry got into the vehicle, and they drove away.

"I have heard of your father's second misfortune," Harry said. "I trust he is not seriously hurt!"

"Oh! no. He is pretty badly bruised, but is not confined to his bed or room."

"Did your father see his assailant at all during the assault?"

"No, sir. The first blow dealt him must have stunned him."

"Has he any recollection of being hit?"

"None at all. He could not clearly understand his situation, on recovering his senses."

Stella let the creams out at a spanking trot, and Radnor Ranch was soon reached.

It was as pretty a place as there was for miles around, and Harry could but envy the man who owned it.

He was conducted into the magnificent parlor by Stella.

Here, the injured banker was pacing to and fro.

He was patched up about the face, with strips of court-plaster, and one of his eyes was discolored.

"I am glad to see you," he said, as Harry entered. "You see I look as if I had been playing with the Boston slugger!"

"Or, rather, as though he had been playing with you," Harry laughed. "I am glad to learn that matters are no worse."

"Yes. I might have been killed. Had the blow on top of my head been a few inches further forward, I would be a dead man."

"You have no idea who your assailant or assailants were?"

"No more than I had before. The attack was from behind and unexpected."

"Did you see any person lurking about when you left Bluffton?"

"No. The town was very quiet, and everybody seemed to be abed."

"Were you robbed?"

"I should say so!"

"Ah! Of how much?"

"Everything of value about my person—my diamonds, watch and money."

"How much money?"

"Over three thousand dollars."

"Your own, or money you won?"

"Half of it I won, at the Oceanic. The rest of it was my own."

"In notes—large ones?"

"There was one five-hundred note; the rest was mostly in twenties."

"Do you know the number of the larger note and its bank of issue?"

"It was a First National of New York, but I do not remember the number."

"How long were you insensible?"

"It was about four o'clock when I left Bluffton—seven when I came to my senses."

"Have you any idea who could have done the job, sir?"

"I have not. You know the town was full of strangers yesterday."

"True, but they mostly cleared out by sunset. Would you suspect Budd Blamphin?"

"Oh! I hear he is rather an unsavory character."

"That may be true, but I don't think he would try anything like that."

"Well, maybe not. There are only two other persons in the place whom I would have reason to suspect."

"Who are they?"

"A pair of New York and Chicago black-legs, who are wanted by the law on several charges."

"Ah! their names?"

"The name of one is George Garrene, a pseudo-lawyer, who robbed a bank in a Western town. The other is a New York confidence chap, named Zeke Smiley—three times at Blackwell's Island. The two work together, of late. Smiley, since coming to Bluffton, has flashed out as Carrol Cuthbert!"

Both Roscoe Radnor and Stella uttered a cry of astonishment.

"This seems impossible!" the former ejaculated.

"Nothing is impossible, in this age," Harry replied. "I don't say either of these crooks tapped you, but they're not above it. Smiley has been playing a pretty game."

"Why, my dear sir, I think you must be mistaken about that young man."

"Not at all. He was, before coming here, turning his hand at counterfeiting, and in recognition of his services the Government has issued this manifesto of approbation."

And with a smile, Harry handed the banker

the official-looking document he had taken from his sachel.

It was a U.S. Government warrant for the arrest of Ezekiel Smiley, *alias* "Handsome George," *alias* Carrol Cuthbert, for violating the laws by counterfeiting.

Attached, was a correct photograph of the face of the man wanted, and it corresponded in every particular, to the face of the man who had been playing the part of Paul Petrie's heir.

Both Stella and her father recognized the picture, and their astonishment knew no bounds.

"It is indeed Cuthbert!" the banker said, indignantly. "The impostor and scoundrel! To think that he should have sought my innocent Stella's society!"

"Men of his stamp are usually gifted with cheek!" Harry remarked, dryly.

"No doubt. And when you arrest this man, just think how heavily the blow will fall upon my dau—"

"Not at all!" Stella interrupted, quickly.

"I have given Mr. Cuthbert plenty of cause to believe I do not fancy his attentions. I am sure, if he is arrested that his dishonor will not reflect to my discredit."

"Nobly spoken!" Sands encouraged. "You in no wise are compromised to his acquaintance. Guard as cautiously as we can, snakes are liable to gain entrance to any home."

"I should have thought you would have arrested this fellow before!" Mr. Radnor said, thoughtfully.

"I should, sir, but on arriving here, and finding them both here, as well as getting an inkling into their game, I concluded to wait, and see if I couldn't catch Garrene in some criminal act, so as to pull the pair together!"

"Ah, I see. Do you think you will be successful in that plan?"

"Possibly. There can be no doubt but what the two still work together, as of old, and all I need, is to catch them at it, to arrest Garrene as Smiley's accomplice. Garrene is really the shrewder of the two scoundrels, and it is no matter of doubt in my mind but what it was he who put Smiley up to this racket of pretending to be Paul Petrie's son."

"Then, do you think one of these villains, or mayhap both, assaulted me?"

"I am not prepared to say positively yet. I shall have to have some little time to find out. At any rate, I believe the men that did the job, providing there is more than one, are in town yet."

High Hat Harry, for reasons of his own, said nothing of his own loss, and, after some further conversation, took his departure, promising the banker to do all in his power to ferret out the mystery.

Stella drove him back to the Oceanic, and then sought the telegraph office, and sent a notice to a prominent capitol detective, at Washington, viz:

"Everything is ready. Consult the chief, and have him send a special, at once, as I shall likely remain here. H. SANDS."

The significance of the message can probably be readily discerned, by the reader!

Garrene and Smiley's coil was unwinding close to the body-piece of the reel!

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO OF A KIND.

In saying that George Garrene was a shrewder villain than Carrol Cuthbert, High Hat Harry had not gone wide of the mark. Cuthbert was sly, and, to a certain extent, crafty; but it remained for Garrene to be the bolder and more active of the two. In other words, he had fewer scruples than had Cuthbert, and a longer head so far as scheming was concerned.

At about the same hour that High Hat Harry was calling at Radnor Ranch, Garrene was down on the pebbly beach below Bluffton, pacing leisurely to and fro.

He was not there simply to listen to the sighing of the ocean, nor to gaze upon the sparkling sunlit waves, but for a purpose, and that purpose was to see the coast "Terror," Budd Blamphin.

He scanned the shanties, but not knowing which one constituted the Terror's headquarters, he wisely concluded to wait until he got a glimpse of the individual in person.

It was not long ere Blamphin issued from one of the habitations and came down toward the Chicagoan. It was a habit of his—Blamphin's—to investigate the business of any and all strangers who came singly upon the beach.

He had seen Garrene several times, but the two were not what could be termed acquainted.

The men eyed each other critically as they met, as if each were trying to size up the other.

"Well," Blamphin said, gruffly, "who are you and what do you want? Who sent ye down heer, an' what ye after?"

"I came down to see you," Garrene replied. "I want to have a little talk with you."

"Ye do, hey? Well, spit out what you've got to say. The wax is out o' me ears."

"Well, let's sit down here on the sand while I say my little say. I propose to startle you, and you can stand the shock better sitting than standing."

They sat down; then Garrene continued, watching his man closely as he spoke:

"I suppose you know my name, Mr. Blamphin—it is George Garrene. I am a sporting character and always on the make. Without money this world would not amount to much to me."

"I reckon that's about the fix every one's in!" Blamphin declared.

"Of course; we all live for gain, and as life is but a short thing, anyhow, we might as well enjoy ourselves, irregardless of a few orthodox scruples. Don't you say so?"

"You bet!"

"I took you to be that sort of a hair-pin. But what puzzles me is how do you let Scuttle shut your eyes up so easy?"

"What?"

Blamphin looked surprised and uneasy. While Garrene smiled, blandly.

"Oh! I'm onto you!" he assured. "I know all about the whole business. You belong to Scuttle's gang, and he shuts your eyes up with the pretense that when he gets the fortune you fellows will get a share."

Now this was a deliberate lie on Garrene's part. He knew nothing about Scuttle, only he had heard that such a person was supposed to exist, surrounded by a band of men, but his claim of knowledge that Blamphin belonged to the gang was wholly untrue.

The coast "Terror" eyed him suspiciously.

"Where'd you find out so much, I'd like to know?" he growled.

"Oh! easy enough. I'm a close observer, and know all about the gang, and your hang-out. Yes, and I know a point more than you do yourself, or any of your companions."

"What?"

"I know who your captain is, and you don't."

"I'll bet ye know who he is!" Buck said, incredulously. "Ef ye do, ye know more than any the rest o' the gang."

"Exactly. That is why I am here in Bluffton. It may not be known to you, but I am a detective."

Blamphin scowled.

"A detective?"

"You can bet—likewise a fortune-hunter. In other and more emphatic words and meaning, I came here to possess myself of a part, or may be the whole of pirate Petrie's fortune."

"Well?"

"Well, it naturally behooved me to look around, and what d'ye s'pose I found?"

"Haven't any idea. You're doin' the talkin', so shout away."

"Well, I found that there existed a secret band of crooks, commanded by a man calling himself Captain Scuttle. Who he actually was none of the gang really knew. I found also that this band of fellows clung to Scuttle, laboring under the delusion that he was perfecting plans to raise the sunken ship, some dark night; or, at any rate, at some period in the near future, and when the gold was recovered you were to receive a liberal share of the treasure. Am I not right?"

"Right enough as far as that goes, I reckon," the Terror growled.

"Of course. I never am wrong," Garrene assured. "Happy faculty, isn't it, never to be wrong? Well, I rather sized the matter up—distilled it through a thoughtful process, you see—filtered it through my mind, and finally came to the conclusion that your captain was playing you for a mess of suckers."

"Did ye?" Blamphin demanded, venomously.

"Well, now, mate, thet ye speak of it, thet idea has kinder struck me thet way too. Now, look here—aire ye tryin' to pump me, or can ye keep yer hatchway shet?"

"I am ostensibly a detective!" Garrene returned, "but when I meet a fellow I think is on the quiet, I am as crooked as they grow."

"Well, now, that's fair enough. I take it ye don't mean the gang no harm?"

"Of course not."

"Well, I'm tellin' you on the quiet, I've had a notion, for some time, that Scuttle was doin' the dirty by us. Now, we've been organized over a year, but he's made no attempt to get the gold, more than by talk."

"Yes!"

"Well, ye see the boys hev a livin' out o' fishin', an' hev b'in patient, expectin' to get a whack at the gold. But I'll be cussed if I see any prospect of gettin' it."

"Nor are you likely to. You have no idea who the captain really is?"

"Durned if I have. I've sized up every cove in the town an' compared him with the captain, but that's all the good it did. The capt'in is a peculiar cuss, and, what's more, he wears his disguise easy, as if it were natural."

"Oh! of course. He is a very fly and at the same time unassuming individual. And now, supposing I was to tell you that this Captain Scuttle is a prominent personage here in Bluffton?"

"I would not doubt it. That he belongs here is sure."

"And supposing I was to tell you that the fortune of the pirate, Paul Petrie, was raised long ago, and is now in Scuttle's possession, and that he is simply toying with you to keep you from suspecting that he has the fortune?"

"Blamed if I know. It might be!"

"And it is?" Garrene assured, warming up to his work. "Captain Scuttle, one of the bloods of this town, is doing that very thing. He has engaged you—for pay, if you get it—to help him keep up the delusion that Paul Petrie's fortune is still under water. But I say it is not!"

"How do you know it is not?" Blamphin asked.

"I will elaborate. When I came here, as I told you before, I came for a purpose. I am a practical sharp. I had in view to secure the treasure. I brought with me a man to personate the heir of Percy and Paul Petrie. I have the proofs now! Well—"

Blamphin whistled.

Some idea seemed to strike him.

Garrene went on.

"Of course I quietly investigated everything appertaining to the case. By careful observance, I found that considerable Spanish gold coin of a date previous to the sinking of the Skull was in circulation in this and adjacent localities. Keeping my own counsel, I followed the matter up, and finally arrived at the conclusion that so much ancient coin could not get afloat hereabouts without the treasure of the Skull had been recovered. From that point I went on. I traced the matter along by degrees, and found that a certain person was circulating this coin, and exchanging it for good money. I also found out who that man was."

Blamphin's passion appeared to be rising.

He seemed to give credit to all the Chicagoan's assertions, and the very thought that he had been "taken in" by another man was gall and wormwood to him.

"Well, who was he?"

Garrene smiled, extracted a "weed" from his pocket, and then looked at the "Terror."

"How much would you and the gang give to find out?" he inquired, calmly.

Blamphin uttered an oath.

"Oh! that's your game is it?" he growled.

"Ef it is, you'll come out short of your mark, or I'm a liar. I reckon you're the one as is countin' on playin' us for a lot of suckers, instead of the captain!"

"Nothing of the kind. That ain't my style. I always look for the army that's got the strongest position, before I enlist. I have a secret to impart, and merely wanted to know if you would be willing to pay anything for it!"

"Not one copper cent!"

"Oh! well; I presumed not. You have not got entire confidence in me yet. But I am not going to let a matter of a few dollars sever our friendship. Ef I name the man who has got the gold, and whom you know under the alias of Scuttle, will you pledge yourself to join me in an attempt to gain possession of the treasure?"

"I should smile! Show me a chance, and I am always ready to improve it."

"As I thought. Well, Paul Petrie's fortune is not under the sea, at all, but it is at this moment in the possession of—"

Here Garrene looked cautiously around him, and then, bending forward, uttered the name in an undertone.

He also made a confession of two recent robberies.

CHAPTER XV.

HARRY AND SYLVA.

HIGH HAT HARRY, on his return to Bluffton, busied himself in his room, for some time.

During the forenoon, an answer to his telegram came back. It was worded thus:

"Notified the chief. Says there is a special, in a city near you, and has given him orders and necessary instructions. Probably will reach you to-night."

Shortly before noon, as Harry was lounging upon the piazza of the hotel, the Ingle barouche—an elegant affair, it was—drew up, and the colored driver in livery dismounted from his high perch, and entered the Oceanic office.

Presently he came forth, and paused beside High Hat Harry.

"You Mister Sands, sah?" he suavely inquired.

"That's my handle!" Harry replied.

"Youh handle, sah?"

"My name."

"Yes, sah! Excuse me. De missy send dis!"

And the sable gentleman extended a delicately-perfumed and exquisitely-tinted envelope, upon which "Mr. Sands" was written in a very pretty style of chirography.

Not without a deal of curiosity the detective opened the envelope, and glanced over the gilt-edged page on which was written as follows:

MR. SANDS, DEAR SIR:—

So well plased was papa with your excellent playing, yesterday, that he desires to make your acquaintance. It will be a pleasure to us all, to receive you at lunch to-day.

Respectfully,
SYLVA INGLE.

To say that the Baseball Detective was merely surprised, would indeed be "drawing it mild."

He read the letter over, several times, considering; then bidding the coachman wait, entered the hotel.

Harry walked about the bar-room a few minutes, meditatively, and then went out upon the piazza, facing the ocean.

"I wonder what dodge this is?" he muttered.

"It is not a free, open and friendly invitation, by any means. There's a motive in that letter."

Just then, the bell-boy of the hotel touched him on the arm, at the same time extending a scrap of paper.

"A crazy-quilt!" he said, and then darted away.

In a scrawling hand, these words were written on the scrap:

"The fox is sly, and the trapper is crafty. The ferret is more sure. It behooves the fox to beware of traps and snares."

ISHMAEL.

Was it a warning?

"The old chap ain't far from right!" Harry muttered, reflectively. "There's a reason for this invitation, and I'm going to find it out. I may be playing a game of checkers, but I am going to Ingleside, and it strikes me that this is the move that will win."

He sought his room.

He took the U. S. warrant from his pocket, took off his left shoe, and fitted the document into it.

He then drew on the shoe, buttoned it, washed himself and combed his hair, and descended to the office of the hotel.

The chief clerk was on duty.

Back of the main office was a private reception room.

"Mr. Jonas, I would like to speak with you in private," Harry said, at the same time exposing his badge—"or, if the proprietor is in, he will do as well."

"The proprietor is out," the clerk responded, "and I will wait upon you. Step this way."

A few minutes later, they were seated in the private office.

"I have but a few questions to ask!" Harry began, "and will come to the point at once. I want not only your reply but your opinion. How many are there of the Ingle family?"

"Ichabod, the father, Ira, the son, and Sylva, the daughter. Then there is old Ishmael, whom you may have seen. He is Ichabod's brother."

"And this Ichabod—is he old, or young; pleasant or surly?"

"A very pleasant old gentleman, and an exemplary citizen, and as true a Christian, in belief, sentiment and action, as you will find. Unfortunately, he is somewhat deaf."

"How about Sylva and Ira?"

"Two of a kind. Of course I would not say this, to go beyond us, but they have a bad spirit. I never saw their mother, but I know they do not take after the old gent."

"And Ishmael?"

"A great many call him crazy and harmless, but I would not like to have him for an enemy."

"Nor I!" Harry said, rising.

And that ended the interview.

Harry left the office, and sought the Ingle barouche.

"If it's a trap!" he communed, "I'll be ready for it."

Ingleside, when they reached the place, he found to be very nearly like Radnor Ranch, but evidently an older estate.

The barouche rolled up a spacious drive, and

let the Baseball Detective out at a portico side entrance to the house, where Sylva Ingle was waiting to receive the guest.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Sands," Sylva said, effusively. "We welcome you as though you had been an acquaintance for years."

Harry was then conducted through spacious halls, into a parlor, which, in point of furnishing, rivaled that of Radnor Ranch.

"Be seated!" Miss Ingle said. "I will go and summon papa."

And she glided gracefully away.

"Summon papa? If I'm not mistaken, papa will be indisposed," Harry silently soliloquized. And it proved so.

When Miss Ingle came back, she was sorry to say that "papa" had a bad headache, but would be able to see Mr. Sands at three.

"In the mean time, Mr. Sands, if you have no other engagements, I will try to entertain you," Sylva said, in her sweetest way. "I will give you my latest selection, and then we will have a game of chess or billiards, whichever you prefer. I suppose you play billiards, eh? If you do, and play as well as you do at ball, you can certainly triple discount me."

Of course they had lunch, first.

When luncheon was over High Hat Harry was conducted into the parlor and treated to a piano performance that was by no means second-class.

When Sylva ceased playing, she came over to where he was seated, her face radiant with smiles.

"Now, Mr. Sands, shall we have a game of billiards? Ira has a splendid new table."

"No billiards at present," Harry replied, calmly, "for this is not my hour for billiards. If you will be seated, I have something interesting to say to you."

"Oh, certainly! I shall be pleased to hear what you have to say."

She then drew a chair near to him, and seeing that she expected him to go on, Harry said:

"Miss Ingle, it was not without some hesitation that I accepted your invitation to lunch, for, in truth, I was greatly surprised."

"Why so, Mr. Sands?"

"For several reasons," Harry replied. "In the first place, you never had an introduction to me, or any cause to believe that I would care to know you; for of course I saw through your papa's racket at the outset, as being a blind to lure me here."

"In the second place, I failed to see how a young lady of your beauty, accomplishments, and social status could so demean herself as to enter into a compact with the notorious scoundrel, George Garrene, to draw me into a trap, even if I am a detective!"

Sylva grew pale.

"Sir! I do not comprehend your meaning!" she faintly articulated.

"Oh! yes you do!" Harry retorted. "Denial is useless, and you might as well understand that fact at once. I was invited here for an evil purpose, and George Garrene is in the house at this minute!"

"'Tis false!—utterly false. I—"

"Bah! do not perjure yourself. It is simply useless. I know that you expect to get a part of the Petrie fortune, by hook or by crook. In order to accomplish that end, you are playing a double game, by using, as you suppose, Carrol Cuthbert and Garrene for stool-pigeons. In reality, they are playing you for a fool. I suppose, perhaps, you are not aware that they are a pair of scoundrels, who travel and work together, and who are wanted by the law!"

"I am not aware of anything of the kind, sir. You are making an unjust accusation, and one I will not listen to. Mr. Cuthbert and Mr. Garrene are both gentlemen."

"Gentlemen! Heaven spare the word, if they are samples! No, Miss Ingle, they are not gentlemen; they are rogues of bad record, and came here to get the Petrie fortune, by fair means or foul."

"I do not see how you associate them as colleagues; they scarcely know each other."

"Don't they? There's where you are wrong. They of course keep on the quiet here, but they are nevertheless partners in crime, and are working together here."

"Then, do you mean to assert that Mr. Cuthbert is an impostor, and not the real Carrol Cuthbert, the grandson of old Paul Petrie?" Sylva demanded, haughtily.

"I do, most emphatically. If you have any doubts about the matter, be kind enough to cast your eyes over this."

And the detective arose and held before her the U. S. warrant.

"You will see," he went on, "that you have

got yourself into a most unenviable position. If I were to expose to the public the fact that you were conspiring with this precious pair of villains, I fancy you would want to go and jump into the Atlantic, rather than endure the disgrace."

"Indeed! You have first to prove that I have been guilty of anything of the kind. I presume, without doubt, that good character and social standing would carry me through without a blemish, no matter what libelous attack you might make on us."

"You only think so now. Miss Ingle, you may really believe I am only talking, but you will find that I mean all that I say. I overheard a conversation between you and a lady prior to the ball-match, that gave me an inkling of your own share in the plot. Later, I overheard a conversation between you and George Garrene, by which I learned that you were in collusion to get possession of the Petrie fortune. In fact, I know all about the whole matter, and that I was invited here to be trapped or gotten rid of. Denial is useless. I am a detective, and as such am in the way of that precious pair of rogues, Garrene and Smiley. They fear they cannot succeed with me around, and want to get me out of the way. They dare not attack me openly, and so have resorted to the plan of enticing me here, with a purpose not unknown to me. But just understand, Sylva Ingle, I can fight just as scientifically as I can play ball, and when I make an arrest, I shall not make a single one."

Sylva grew whiter, and her eyes dilated with terror, for she well understood what his words implied. If he arrested two, he would extend the legal process so as to capture three."

"You mean to imply that you would arrest me?" she uttered, with perceptible agitation.

"Most assuredly! Rogues and their colleagues are liable to arrest at any moment. Of course, I respect you as a woman; but when I come to consider that you are in collusion with this Garrene, it becomes my duty to arrest you. The only chance I see for you to avoid this arrest, and escape actual imprisonment, is to make an out-and-out confession."

"If I confess—"

"If you confess, and, when brought to court, turn in your evidence against Garrene and Smiley, I will see that you are not further compromised. Perhaps I can so arrange it that you will not be called to court at all, or in any way disgraced. So far as I can see, this is your only avenue of escape."

Sylva remained silent for several minutes, her hands toying with her watch-chain.

It was plain that she was frightened, and inclined to come over.

"I don't think I have done anything so criminal as to be subject to arrest," she finally said; "but if I have, I am willing to make all the reparation in my power."

"Very well. That is all that is necessary, and the only safe course for you now to pursue. I have the power to arrest the two villains, were you not to utter a word. You will find it to your interest, however, to make an open confession to me."

"If I do, will you promise not to expose me?"

"I will try to shield you as I said, from disgrace, as much as possible, providing I find you earnestly repentant and honest."

"Very well. What do you want me to confess?"

"First the reason why I was enticed here."

"That can be done in a few words. Garrene came and said we must get rid of you, or you, being a detective, would arrest us and lodge us in jail, for conspiring to get unlawful possession of the Petrie fortune. I did not know that Cuthbert and Garrene were allies, and, knowing how heavily the disgrace of arrest would fall on me, I finally consented to entice you here, but personally to do nothing more."

"How was it proposed to get rid of me?"

"Garrene got up the plot. I was to invite you to the billiard-room, after dinner, and when we had played a few games, I was to give you a glass of wine what he had so drugged that you would quickly become insensible. Then he was to lock you up in the billiard-room, and keep you there until midnight, when you was to be taken from the house on the quiet, put into a close carriage, and taken to a deserted oyster-fisher's hut, up the coast, there to be kept a close prisoner, until possession of the fortune was secure. Then, Garrene and I were to clope together, to some foreign clime, and there enjoy our gains. That is all!"

"A very pretty plot, I must confess!" High Hat Harry observed, grimly. "Very likely, instead of being taken to the hut you mention, I

would have been given a chance to soak in the sea! Is Garrene in the house?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Secreted in a closet off the billiard-room. But, for God's sake, sir, do not attempt to arrest him here. Just think of the sensation it would make; and even if you did not expose me, he might, out of spite. Just consider how I and all my family would be disgraced."

"It is not my intention to arrest him, at once, but I shall do so, ere many days pass. Now, how did he propose to carry out this scheme, for I infer he must have expected to get hold of the fortune, within a few days, as it would be a doubtful matter if a man could be imprisoned in a hut, along this coast, for any length of time without being discovered."

Sylva was silent for a several minutes, before she answered.

"I guess I had best tell all and have done with it. What you want to know is, how Garrene expected to possess himself of the fortune."

"Exactly."

"Well, if, as you claim, you overheard a conversation between Garrene and myself since coming here, you probably heard the name of Captain Scuttle mentioned. Such a person is supposed to exist along this coast, surrounded possibly by a band of men, it being their prime object to get possession of the sunken treasure. Those who have any faith that there is any such person as Captain Scuttle regard my uncle Ishmael with suspicion, and believe that he is in reality Scuttle, and has already obtained possession of the fortune, and is trying to disguise the fact."

"What is your opinion?"

"I favor the idea. The majority of the people of Bluffton count Ishmael as being crazy, but he is nothing of the kind; he is as sane as you or I."

"Well?"

"Garrene has another notion, and appears positive about it, claiming to have assured himself. He assumes to have discovered that a certain citizen of this place came here from the West, by no means rich, and shortly after his arrival purchased a fine piece of property and erected a residence that must have, at the least calculation, cost twenty thousand dollars. Not long after this he found that Spanish coin, which was supposed to constitute the bulk of the Petrie treasure, was gradually being exchanged for United States money, and he claims to have traced the matter so far as to know that this Western citizen has in his possession the fortune, recovered from the sea in some manner unknown to us. Therefore, depicting to me the delights and luxuries a half of the great fortune would bring me, Garrene induced me to become a partner to his scheme."

"I have not mentioned to you all his plans. After you was decoyed here and secured, a letter was to be sent to Stella and Ray Radnor, summoning them at once to the Oceanic on important business. Shortly after they left Radnor Ranch a false telegram was to be sent to Stella's father, summoning him, also, to the Oceanic. This would leave the ranch in the charge of two servants."

"After Mr. Radnor's departure, Garrene and a companion—he did not tell me who—were to gain an entrance to the house, capture the servants, and then find where the coin was secreted, take possession of it and go to the Northwest, where, in due time, I was to join them and receive my share of the fortune. That is all. I have told you all I can."

Harry was silent for a few minutes, and then said:

"By this explanation you mean to hint that Mr. Radnor has possession of the Petrie fortune?"

"That is Garrene's belief."

It was then for the Baseball Detective to get control of his thinking faculties.

The case now bore a different aspect.

Was it not possible that Mr. Radnor *did* possess the fortune, and was causing it to be believed, by various reasons, that the fortune still lay at the bottom of the sea? And, was it not possible that Radnor was in reality Captain Scuttle?

Then, if Radnor and Scuttle were one and the same person, was it not possible that Scuttle's alleged niece was in reality Stella Radnor?

If so, she must naturally be a consenting party to the marriage that was booked to be solemnized that evening!

"I suppose that Garrene's companion in the intended robbery," he said, finally, "would have been this impostor, Carrol Cuthbert?"

"Possibly. I do not know."

"Have you any reason to believe that your brother, Ira, is in any way connected with any of Garrene's schemes?"

"No! Ira may be quick and impetuous of temperament, but he would be the last one to ally himself to any criminal, or do any criminal act."

"I am glad to hear that. And now, in conclusion, who assaulted Roscoe Radnor and robbed him?"

Sylva grew a trifle whiter.

"How do you expect me to know?" she demanded, with attempted hauteur. "Because I have been guilty of some indiscretions I don't see why you should lay everything at my door."

Harry laughed dryly.

"Oh! of course I do not accuse you of making the assault," he said, "but I fancied it might lie in your power to express some ideas about the matter."

"Well, all I know is this, and cross-questioning would surely fail to elicit anything further. George Garrene lost every cent he had through betting on the ball-game. He came to me and wanted a loan of money, which I was not able to grant. I have reason to believe that to-day he has a considerable sum of money about his person. Where he got it is something I do not know."

That practically ended the interview, for, after a few more words, Harry took his departure.

Before he went he instructed Sylva to announce to Garrene that, under no pretext, could she lure him (Harry) to the billiard-room; and, also, she was to use all her efforts to dissuade Garrene from the opinion that the Baseball Detective had any suspicion that a trap had been set for him.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SHOT FROM THE DARK.

ON his return to Bluffton, Harry kept himself close to his room, for the remainder of the day, devoting himself considerably to deliberation.

The approaching night drew on with more rapidity, it seemed to him, than was usual. The minutes, in undue haste, converted themselves into hours.

This, Harry was aware, was because of his approaching marriage, of which he could but naturally have a dread.

Could he have some positive knowledge whom he was to marry, it would, of course, alter circumstances considerably.

As it was he had bound himself, by a solemn oath, to marry the alleged niece of Captain Scuttle, without knowing for a certainty who or what she was.

If she were Stella Radnor, the fateful match would be to his satisfaction, and he would have no desire to have the marriage bond severed.

But was his unknown affianced Stella Radnor?

That was a momentous question.

He had no further assurance on the matter, than Sylva Ingle's statement of Garrene's belief that Roscoe Radnor had possession of the fortune, and his own belief that if Rodman had the fortune, he and Scuttle were one and the same person.

Night gradually drew on, and as soon as it was dark he made preparations to visit the cave.

He looked carefully to the condition of his revolver, and then, going down to the beach, he paced to and fro along the sands for some time, in hopes that he would get a glimpse of old Ishmael, for, disbelieving that Ishmael was Captain Scuttle, and not knowing what might happen at the cave, he wished to leave a clew behind as to what had become of him in case he should not return.

But Ishmael was not to be seen, and Harry finally began his journey along the dangerous path leading to the cave.

The night promised to be a wild one, the heavens were overcast with inky patches of clouds that rolled up like large ominous mountains as they drifted into view over the ocean horizon, to send the in-coming tide dashing against the face of the rocky bluff with force to envelop the ocean front in a cloud of mist.

Heaven's pyrotechnical display had not yet begun, but the sullen roar of thunder was heard in the immeasurable distance.

Harry, however, found the bluff path less hard to traverse, on this second trip, and in due time he arrived at the entrance to the cave.

He did not enter immediately, but stood there in the face of the bluff, looking oceanward, and

debating the doubtful question, "what would this adventure entail?"

At last, however, he parted the clinging vines, and entered the first portion of the secret rendezvous.

Here he found utter darkness to prevail, but he had not come unprepared for this.

Drawing several matches from his pocket, he struck them in succession, and was thus able to perceive that he was the sole occupant of the first apartment or passage.

This was a matter of some little surprise to him, for he had anticipated that at least some of the gang would be there to meet him.

But no one was, and grasping his revolver, he cautiously advanced.

He did not have any particular reason to believe that a trap would be set for him, unless Budd Blamphin and his pals were to do it, for he well knew Blamphin bore him no good-will; but by groping his way along, he at last reached the door of the inner apartment, where he had previously been interviewed by Captain Scuttle.

Here he rapped, and the door was directly opened by Scuttle, who invited him to enter.

The room presented the same appearance as on High Hat Harry's previous visit, and except himself, Captain Scuttle was the only occupant.

"I am glad to see you so prompt," the captain said, handing Harry a seat. "My niece has not yet arrived, but will be here shortly, in company with the minister."

"Where are the members of your band? Are they not to be present?" Harry asked.

"No. They know nothing about this. This is not our regular meeting night, and none of them are in the cave."

"Then you do not propose to inform them about the matter?"

"I have not decided on that score. It is possible I shall not say anything about it."

They chatted for some time, then the door of the inner passage was opened, and two persons entered.

One was a clerical-looking, smooth-faced man, of middle age, attired in black.

The other was presumably of the opposite sex, for she was attired in habiliments of the feminine order.

She was of medium height, and of evident good figure.

She wore a cloak, which concealed all but the bottom pleating of her dress, a pretty hat, and thick veil over her face, which rendered it impossible to distinguish her features.

Captain Scuttle at once stepped forward, and taking the young lady by one of her hands, both of which were gloved, led her forward.

"Mr. Sands!" he said, "this is my niece, whom you are to wed. Arnie, this is Mr. Sands."

The young lady extended her hand, and Sands took it in his own, to feel it pressed gently, and then relinquished.

After a short preliminary conversation, during which Arnie announced her willingness to wed Sands, and declared that she was under no compulsion whatever, the two took their place beside each other, and the knot was tied, making Harry Sands and Arnie Scuttle man and wife, according to the Presbyterian ritual.

When the ceremony was concluded, the minister and the bride at once took their departure, by the route they had come, and Scuttle and Harry were left alone.

It was for a brief space of time, however.

The minister and Arnie had not been gone over ten minutes, when a knock came upon the door of the outer passage.

"Who the dickens can that be?" the captain muttered. "It must be some one of the band has come for something."

"Ishmael!" flashed across Harry's mind, but he did not express himself aloud.

Scuttle arose, and going to the door, unbarred and opened it.

Upon the threshold, indeed, stood Ishmael.

He looked frightened and nervous.

"The devil! You here?" burst from Scuttle's lips.

"How did you find out about this place?" "I have known of this place long before you came here. It may not be known to you, sir, but Percy Petrie and I hollowed out this cavern, for the most part."

"Ah! then, you have known of our existence before?"

"I have. I have been here, skulking about, whenever I took a notion to do so."

"What brings you here?"

"To give you warning! It may cost me my life, but I felt it was my duty to come."

"What warning have you to give?"

"This: I knew the young man there, was to

wed your daughter, and I feared there might be trouble. So I kept watch of the gang, and overheard an interview between them and three other persons at Blamphin's shanty."

"Well?"

"Well, the result of this interview is, that you have got the Petrie gold in your possession. They know of the marriage, and believe that you, the girl and this young man, who they claim is the real heir, propose to skip off on the quiet, for parts unknown. So they have formed a plan to put a stop to that!"

Captain Scuttle uttered a grunt of anger.

"Well, what is their plan?" he demanded.

"This: The majority of the gang are at this moment *en route* here, armed to the teeth, bent on surprising and capturing you and Sands, and confining you in the dungeon. In the mean time, the other parties have gone up to the heights, will gain entrance to your house, and, after capturing the inmates, will turn the place inside out, if need be, so as to find the gold. Then, when they find it, a grand skip will be made for parts unknown!"

"Ishmael, are you lying to me?" the captain demanded, sternly. "Is this true?"

"It surely is, sir. Why should I deceive you? I—"

Just then a pistol report rung out, and Ishmael, who had been standing in the door, uttered a cry of pain, and fell forward upon the rocky floor.

"They are coming!" he moaned. "May God help you and Percy Petrie's heir now!"

And he expired without a groan!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CAVE CONFLICT.

IT was now time for immediate action, and that, too, without delay.

High Hat Harry instantly sprung out of range of the open door, and drew his revolver.

Captain Scuttle stooped, jerked Ishmael's body into the room, and slamming shut the door, succeeded in barring it just as a hail of bullets came spattering against the oaken panels.

"What are you going to do!" Harry demanded, eagerly.

"Hold the devils at bay, as long as possible!" was the grim reply.

"Then?"

"Fight."

"But, they've the odds."

"Maybe so. I'll never surrender, without a struggle though!"

Just then there came an authoritative rap upon the door.

"Open up, in thar!" Budd Blamphin's coarse voice ordered.

"Nary an open!" flung back Scuttle. "You'll have to wait. I'm busy."

"Don't keer a durn fer thet. We ain't goin' to be put off. We ain't goin' ter hev no feller a-lyin' 'bout us, you kin bet."

"Who's been lying about you?"

"Thet cuss, Ishmael!"

"Nothing of the kind!"

"Git out! ye can't stuff us! We see'd him blab suthin' to ye, an' so, plugged him!"

"Who shot him?"

"Let's in an' I'll tell ye."

"No, sir! I already know what your mission is, but you will fail!"

"Will we? Waal, not much we won't! Ef ye don't open that door, we'll bu'st her in."

"Do so, at your peril! There are two of us, doubly armed, and whoever crosses that threshold, comes to his death!"

The captain spoke sternly.

There was a ring to his voice that betokened stern spirit, and unflinching courage.

Blamphin's voice was not heard, for several minutes, again.

He and his pals were evidently consulting.

Then, it was that High Hat Harry took occasion to say:

"Do you think they can burst the door in?"

"Without doubt, if they heave a big rock against it, for it is not constructed for such an assault."

"Then, wha? Can we hold them at bay?"

"We can't!" Scuttle replied sententiously, "for I can do it myself. As for you, I have something else for you to do."

"What?"

"Sh! They may be listening. Did you infer by Ishmael's speech, who I really am?"

"Roscoe Radnor."

"Correct! You see the door yonder? Well, that door opens into a passage that will lead you directly up into my house, on the Bluff—Radnor Ranch. They are in trouble up there. You must go to their assistance. Take the lantern,

yonder, and hasten, at once—to the protection of your bride and the Petrie fortune. I will remain here, and hold these hell-hounds at bay, as long as possible. If I fall, Stella will tell you all you want to know. Go, sir, at once, or it may be too late, when you get there!"

"But, if I take the lantern, you will be left in darkness?"

"So much the better. I can fight in the dark as well as in the light. I've twenty-four shots, and if I cannot clean out that crowd I'll be willing to pass in my checks."

Without parley, the detective took the lantern, and opening the door, plunged away into the depths of the passage.

After he was gone, Captain Scuttle muttered: "The young man has the right metal, and Stella could not fall into the hands of a better man. The fortune is now hers, and his. And, now, come on, ye devils! You will find me here, and at home!"

This latter challenge, was evidently meant for the gang, on the other side of the door, though it was not uttered in words loud enough to reach them.

Blamphin's voice was again heard, a moment later.

"Well, in there, aire ye goin' ter open up, or shell we bu'st the door?"

"Burst the door, if you like!" Scuttle replied; "you know the result!"

"Bah! We kin kill ye in half a second, an' well ye know it, boss!"

"Try it, and see! Death to whoever crosses this threshold!"

There was a savage oath from Blamphin. Then the gang appeared to move off.

After which was silence. But Scuttle knew they would return.

They were all daring, resolute men, not burdened with scruples of any sort, and their blood was up now to get possession of the Petrie fortune.

Nothing but the impossible would stop them. Soon Scuttle detected their footfalls returning, and knew by the regularity of step that they were carrying some heavy obstacle—doubtless a large piece of rock, as there was no timber available in the vicinity.

A halt was made near the door, and then Blamphin's hoarse voice shouted:

"All ready now, and together! He—o—

he!"

The next instant the battering-ram came crashing against the door, which, for an instant seemed loth to yield to the ponderous assault, but it was for an instant only, then it tottered like a drunken man, and fell inward, with a crash, and with a howl of triumph, Budd Blamphin leaped forward.

"Hurrah, boys!" he yelled. "Foller me, an' we'll knock the bottom out o' the Scuttle, or die in the attempt!"

"Die, then, treacherous hell-hounds—die!" cried Scuttle, from the gloom.

Then the desperate conflict began—such a conflict as the coast cavern never before had witnessed, and it is hoped, never again would see.

The ring and the flash of revolvers made the rocky chamber a wild and awful place for the space of several minutes.

Fearful oaths and screams of agony blended with the reports of the weapons.

But slowly, yet surely, the reports lessened in numbers, until the last one awoke the echoes, and some person fell, with a dull thud.

The darkness covered all then, and silence reigned supreme.

Not the stir of a person could be heard nor a moan of pain.

What did it mean?

Had the conflict ended the lives of all engaged therein?

It truly seemed so!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE END.

THE three persons whom Ishmael had mentioned as having been in consultation with Blamphin and his pals, were, as the reader may have supposed, none others than Garrene, Smiley, alias Carrol Cuthbert, and Sylva Ingle, who was now thoroughly disguised and dressed in male attire.

When the conference at Blamphin's cabin had ended, this trio mounted to Bluffton village, hired a carriage, and drove quietly to Radnor Ranch.

The darkness of the night, and the impending storm, seemed all in their favor.

When they arrived at the Ranch the lights were all out, and everybody was apparently abed.

Across the road from the Radnor residence was a little picnic grove, and into this the horse and carriage were driven and secreted.

Then, with a number of things they might need to use, the trio gained entrance to the Radnor grounds.

Smiley carried a kit of burglar's tools, Garrene a stout tin case of chloroform, something the Chicago "crook" always had with him, as being a part of his stock-in-trade. Sylva bore a pair of revolvers, ready for use.

"I wonder if there are any dogs about the premises?" Garrene asked, when they were on the lawn.

"None," Sylva assured. "Raynor never liked dogs."

Then they went carefully around the house, on a tour of reconnaissance and inspection.

No lights were to be seen; the house was evidently closed up for the night.

After some deliberation, a side door, opening out of a wing of the building, was selected as the best place to gain entrance.

Leaving Garrene and Sylva to keep guard, Smiley set to work, and the manner in which he handled the tools of the trade, proved him to be an expert cracksmen.

He had the door open in five minutes, without causing any noise.

They then noiselessly entered what proved to be a parlor—a sort of lounging-room, rather.

Sylva led the way.

She had often been in the house, and knew the location of every room.

After inspecting the lower part of the house, and satisfying themselves that none of the family were about, they went up-stairs.

As far as Sylva knew, there were six servants, who occupied a tier of rooms in the south wing—so remote as not likely to be at all in the way.

A careful reconnaissance being made, it was found that there was a light in Stella's room, although it was turned low. Two persons were in the apartment, holding a subdued conversation—Stella and her brother, very likely.

The burglars hovered close to the door, ready for instant action; then George Garrene gave a light tap.

"Ah! there's papa, now," Stella was heard to say, and, in another instant, she had unlocked and flung open the door.

Garrene and Smiley at once precipitated themselves into the chamber, knocking Stella down and pouncing upon Ray Radnor ere he could recover from his surprise sufficiently to resist.

He was easily overpowered, and bound hand and foot—Sylva, in the mean time, doing her part by keeping Stella "covered" with a six-shooter, and guarding the door.

As soon as Ray was secured, Stella was served in a like manner.

"You cowardly villains, what is the meaning of this indignity?" Ray demanded, fiercely.

"It means, my dear Radnor," replied Garrene, coolly, "that you are temporarily our prisoners. Your beloved father is likewise a prisoner—if, indeed, he has not been killed—and Harry Sands the same. All the servants in your house are also prisoners. So you see you are helpless, and can exercise your vocal powers as musically as you may desire. I suppose you know what brings us here?"

"No!" Ray growled. "No good motive, I dare say."

"Well, that depends on circumstances. We want the fortune!"

"The what?"

"The fortune. Don't try playing innocent. It won't work. We're onto the hull racket 'bout your father's 'bein' Cap Scuttle, and havin' the Petrie fortune stored away somewhere about this place."

"You are certainly laboring under a great mistake, sir."

"Bah! no more denial, now, or it will be the worse for you. Of course, we can find the treasure, by making a protracted search, but that ain't our lay. We want to get it at once and skip, before the rest of the gang gets here. So you must tell us where and how to lay hands on it."

Ray laughed dryly.

"What a fool!" he said. "If I knew, do you suppose I'd tell you?"

"Exactly!"

"Well, I wouldn't!"

"Nor I!" chimed in Stella.

"Oh! that's all well enough to say. But, you'll change your tune. If you don't tell us, immediately, we'll torture you to death but what you shall give up the secret."

"Torture, if you will, you accursed thieves!"

but you'll never get a word out of me!" Ray declared, grimly.

"Nor out of me!" assured Stella, with flashing eyes. "I'd die first!"

"Will you? Well! you shall yet have the chance. But before death you shall endure the torture of sheol!"

With this assertion Garrene gazed around the room, as if in quest of some instrument of torture.

He saw one—an open fire-place with kindlings in the grate.

"Light that fire!" he ordered. "We'll scorch the soles of their feet till they tell!"

While Garrene and Smiley employed themselves in removing the prisoner's shoes, Sylva engaged herself in lighting the fire.

That the wretches meant to carry out their plot seemed sure.

But they were destined to be baffled.

A man dashed into the room, armed with a ball bat, knocking the sentinel, Sylva, flat upon the floor.

It was High Hat Harry, the Baseball Detective!

With two slashing blows, he struck right and left, laying out first Garrene, then Smiley, and then the disguised Sylva, as she attempted to rise. All were knocked senseless.

To bind them and release Ray and Stella was but the work of a few moments.

The birds of evil were in the snare at last!

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To bind them and release Ray and Stella was but the work of a few moments.

The birds of evil were in the snare at last!

A descent was then made into the cave, where the gang were all found dead and the captain dying.

Before death he explained that his real name was Scuttle, and that he had raised the gold secretly after coming to Bluffton, and it was now all in paper money or bonds, or good property.

And Stella was really Harry's wife.

The other detective arrived and took charge of Smiley and Garrene next day. They are in prison now—at work.

Sylva was released that night—a disgraced woman; but not so known to the public, for Harry and the Radnors were too full of pity to betray or humiliate her—an act for which she seemingly was deeply grateful—but, who can say how far gratitude is possible to such natures as hers?

The cave tragedy, of course, created an immense sensation; but only a few persons were permitted to visit the scene. After inquest, all the bodies were removed and quietly buried; so the affair soon ceased to be the one subject of discussion. The outer entrance to the rock-chamber was solidly closed, and the passage up into the Radnor residence sealed, and so to-day its very existence has become a matter of doubt.

It never transpired that Harry and Stella had the fortune. They went West, leaving Ray master of the ranch, and if the pirate Petrie's sunken treasure is not put to good use it will not be because Harry and Stella are selfish and sordid in their enjoyment of it on one of the finest ranches in Colorado, where Harry Sands and his spirited and beautiful wife dispense a princely hospitality.

THE END.

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